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TRACTS

CONCERNING

CHRISTIANITY.

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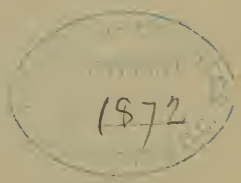
BY

ANDREWS NORTON.



CAMBRIDGE:
JOHN BARTLETT.
1852.

BT121
.N67

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1852, by
ANDREWS NORTON,
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CAMBRIDGE:
METCALF AND COMPANY,
PRINTERS TO THE UNIVERSITY.

PREFACE.

The Tracts collected in this volume all have a common purpose, to vindicate the truths of Christianity from errors which have been connected with them, or by which they have been assailed. But, in the interval between the composition of the earliest of these articles and the latest of them, errors of very different kinds, errors contradictory to and destructive of each other, have prevailed, some at one time, and some at another, in that portion of the Christian world with which we have most concern. We may hope that they are beginning to pass away; but their pernicious consequences, and the causes by which they have been produced, will long remain; and the errors themselves will continue to appear, if not under their old, under new aspects. The truth has not yet made such progress as to take their place. If there be any value, there-

fore, in these Tracts, it must be partly in their present, and partly in their historical relations. It is a preservative against false opinions to know their history,—to know that they have been maintained, and why they have been rejected.

TRACTS

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A

DEFENCE

OF

LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

The article which follows has not been republished since its first appearance, nearly forty years ago. It was written in a state of things very different from what now exists around us. Since that time the progress of this country in general literature, in the physical and exact sciences, and in religious liberality, has been very great; not, perhaps, falling behind its advance in material prosperity. But, during the last forty years, there has not been in this country, nor in England, nor, I think, in any European country, (for I certainly do not regard Germany as an exception,) a correspondent progress in correct modes of thinking and reasoning upon the highest subjects of human thought, or in establishing and clearly exhibiting those facts on which all rational conclusions concerning religion must rest.

If the propositions concerning religion maintained in the following article are true, they are truths of equal importance at all times. But the mode of presenting them may vary according to the errors to be opposed. The errors which I had in view in writing it are still the *professed* errors of a very large portion of Christians, — professed in their creeds, and insisted upon by many as their individual conviction. They have been called the distinguishing doctrines of

Christianity; and whatever disposition there may be to shrink from assenting to their literal statement, yet, in some disguised and mitigated form at least, they enter into most men's conceptions of our religion. But in what, I fear, may be called the general suspension of rational thought and feeling concerning religious truth, they are at the present moment lying comparatively dormant; and their ill influence is most felt in their repelling the minds of men, by the view of Christianity which they present, from any desire to know what Christianity really is.

It was not so at the time when this article was written. Of the state of things then existing in the community in which I lived, I some time since gave an account in a letter to my friend, Mr. George Ticknor, in reply to a request for "information on the origin and progress of liberal views of Christianity in New England, and on Mr. Buckminster's relations to them." It was printed in the "Christian Examiner" for September, 1849, and, with some unimportant omissions, is here subjoined.

"As you know, there has been from an early period, I cannot say how early, a resistance to the rigid Calvinism of our forefathers, and to their false conceptions of religion. The authority of their system was broken in upon by the publication of Roger Williams's 'Bloudy Tenent,' in 1644. I cannot from memory trace the history of this resistance. Perhaps — I place no confidence in my recollections — the most important work against the *peculiar doctrines* of Calvinism, which subsequently appeared, was one published just a century later, in 1744, entitled, 'Grace Defended,' by Experience Mayhew, the missionary to the Indians, and the father of Dr. Jonathan Mayhew. But, from the middle of the last century, there was a considerable and increasing

body, both of the clergy and the laity, who rejected with more or less explicitness the doctrines of Calvinism, and modified the doctrine of the Trinity into what has been called 'high Arianism,' that is, into the proper, ancient, Arian doctrine. The name Arminian soon began to be familiarly used to denote such heretics, often with some epithet of disrespect. The tendency to separation between the two parties had, indeed, commenced before the middle of the last century, and was increased by the preaching of Whitefield in this country, who arrived for the first time in 1740, and whose extravagances and denunciations gave offence, and tended to weaken the credit of his doctrines.

"This controversy, as men did not reason in those days from their spiritual intuitions, implied learning, and a critical knowledge of the Scriptures, after the fashion of those times. These studies extended even to the laity, some of whom were interested in settling their faith for themselves. One of the earliest books which I read relating to the exposition of the Scriptures, many years ago, when quite a young man, was a copy of the original edition of Taylor on the Romans, borrowed from the family of an old gentleman who had formerly recommended and lent it to my father.

"Besides the main controversy between 'the Orthodox' and 'liberal Christians,' there were other controversies, which kept alive a spirit of inquiry, and attention to theological learning generally, and particularly to the critical study of the Scriptures; such as those respecting Episcopacy, and the doctrine of the final salvation of all men, in both of which Dr. Chauncy particularly distinguished himself.

"But, if my recollection serves me correctly, there was in the last twenty years of the last century a suspension of controversy between our two great religious parties, a lull in

our theological world, broken only by the writings of Hopkins and his followers and opponents, which added nothing to the theological learning of our country. This condition of things was in a great measure produced by the state of public affairs in our own country and in Europe, which engrossed men's thoughts and feelings. Religious opinions were less clearly defined; clergymen, holding, as they conceived, opposite doctrines, did not in all cases feel bound to keep aloof from each other. This state of things continued into the present century; but the truce was soon broken.

"One of the first symptoms of the renewed struggle was the appearance of the 'Panoplist,'* I think in 1804. In that publication I do not recollect any thing marked by its learning or its power of general reasoning. It did nothing to promote theological science. But the flame which it was intended to kindle blazed forth on the election of Dr. Ware, who was a liberal Christian in the best sense of the words, and a good theological scholar, to the professorship of divinity in Harvard College. This was in 1805. But the controversy which followed was not managed with extraordinary ability by the liberal party. Through the influence of many causes, which rendered the fact natural and excusable, members of that party were not sufficiently explicit in the avowal of their opinions; there was a tendency among them to represent themselves as not essentially disagreeing with their opponents; and in general, though the superiority of the liberal party in learning was then acknowledged, they wanted the learning necessary to give them assurance in their opinions, and to enable them fully and satisfactorily to explain and defend them. The feelings of resistance in the other party were very strong and active. They denounced their opponents

* A periodical publication.

as enemies of the Gospel, and excluded from the hope of salvation. This strong language, which may sound so strangely in our times, is fully supported by the controversial writings of that period. I may refer especially to the different Letters of Dr. Worcester to Mr. Channing, Dr. Worcester having come forward at a later date (in 1815) as a champion of the Orthodox party. The prestige of Orthodoxy continued very powerful; and there were many whose own opinions would have borne no severe test, who yet shrunk from any direct opposition to it. I cannot fix the precise date, but it was after 1805, that I was informed by a young minister, that, on his professing his disbelief of the Trinity, he was told by one of the most distinguished clergymen of Boston, and a most liberal-minded man, that he had better not publicly avow it.

"It was in this state of things, in 1805, when he was not yet twenty-one years old, that Mr. Buckminster was ordained as pastor of the society in Brattle Street. In less than eight years, — eight years interrupted by constant ill-health, and by constant labors and avocations connected with his ministry, — he was taken from us. The blossoms and fruits of his mind — ripe fruits — appeared together. I have nothing to add to the opinions I expressed, immediately after his death, in the 'General Repository,' concerning the influence of his genius, his learning, his whole character, in promoting and giving an impulse to all good literature among us, and especially to the liberal and enlightened study of theology. These opinions were afterwards confirmed by the corresponding views presented in the excellent Memoir of him, by his friend and mine, Mr. Thacher. This Memoir, and the notices of him in the General Repository, (there were two,) are prefixed to the last edition of his Sermons.

"I will go on to mention a few facts which throw light on the state of religious opinion and feeling, and of theological learning, during the period of which I have spoken. In 1812, I published, as editor, the first volume of the 'General Repository.' I suppose I need have no hesitation in stating, what was then generally recognized, that in this work the tone of opposition to the prevailing doctrines of Orthodoxy was more explicit, decided, and fundamental than had been common among us. The first article in the volume, entitled 'A Defence of Liberal Christianity,' was written by myself. Mr. Buckminster expressed to me, on his own part, no dissatisfaction with its sentiments, but told me of a remark made on it by our common friend, Mr. Vaughan of Hallowell, the pupil and friend of Dr. Priestley, — that it reminded him of what the English Unitarians had been called, namely, 'the sect of the Imprudents.' For one who should read it now, with only a knowledge of the present state of religious opinion and feeling in our country, it might be difficult to discover why the writer should be thought to belong to the sect of the Imprudents. But, in 1809, Mr. Buckminster had said, in a letter to Mr. Belsham, (published in Williams's Life of Belsham,) 'Do you wish to know any thing of American theology? I can only tell you, that, except in the small town of Boston and its vicinity, there cannot be collected, from a space of one hundred miles, six clergymen who have any conceptions of rational theology, and who would not shrink from the suspicion of Antitrinitarianism in any shape.'

"But the publication of the General Repository soon failed for want of support. It was too bold for the proper prudence, or the worldly caution, or for the actual convictions, of a large portion of the liberal party. Mr. Channing, in a defence of those who were then among us beginning to be

called Unitarians, in his 'Letter to Mr. Thacher,' published in 1815, said of it, 'As to the General Repository, I never for a moment imagined that its editor was constituted or acknowledged as the organ of his brethren; and, while its high literary merit has been allowed, I have heard some of its sentiments disapproved by a majority of those with whom I conversed.' When, in 1819, I was elected Professor of Biblical Criticism, the President of the College, Dr. Kirkland, informed me that Mr. Channing, who was then a member of its Corporation, was willing to assign me the duties and the salary of the office, but objected to giving me the title of Professor on account of the injury it might be to the College to make so conspicuous its connection with one holding such opinions as mine.

"Its decided character, however, was not the only obstacle to the success of the General Repository. It was overburdened with learning, or with what passed for learning among us, out of proportion to the amount of theological knowledge, or interest in such knowledge, which existed among its readers. I gave in it an account of the controversy between Dr. Priestley and Dr. Horsley, the fame of which had not then died out; and this was continued through several numbers. Dr. Kirkland, with his usual happiness in giving advice indirectly, told me that people said 'I was writing what nobody but myself understood.' Still an effort was made by its friends to promote its circulation. In 1813, a recommendation of it (unsolicited by me) was published as a circular, bearing the signatures of five of the most respectable laymen of Boston. But it was not thought advisable that any clergyman should sign it.

"The facts which I have stated, few as they are, may throw some light on the oppressive bigotry which at that time prevailed among us. I am tempted to add another proof.

A passage comes to my recollection of a lecture which I delivered in the College Chapel, about the year 1816 (I cannot fix the precise date). I have looked it up in the manuscript, and find it to be to this effect: —

"'Whatever an ill man believes,' says Jeremy Taylor, 'if he therefore believes it because it serves his own ends, be his belief true or false, the man hath an heretical mind; for, to serve his own ends, his mind is prepared to believe a lie. But a good man, that believes what, according to his light and the use of his moral industry, he thinks true, whether he hits upon the right or no, because he hath a mind desirous of truth, and prepared to believe every truth, is therefore acceptable to God; because nothing hindered him from it but what he could not help, — his misery and his weakness, — which being imperfections merely natural, which God never punishes, he stands fair for a blessing of his morality, which God always accepts.' This is admirable. — But it is melancholy to think, that we have so long been accustomed to nothing but what is bigoted and narrow and irrational on the subject of religion, that we feel delight in the expression of any generous or manly sentiment, though it be nothing but the most obvious truth. We are like those who have been so long confined within the walls of a prison, that they are filled with emotion at being restored to the common light and air.

"When we consider that it would be an absurdity too gross to be imagined, for one among us at the present day to deliver in a lecture the concluding remarks on the passage from Taylor, we may comprehend what a vast change has taken place since they were written.

"I some time since observed a passage in a note by Mr. W. H. Channing to the Preface to his Memoir of his uncle, in which he says, that, in a sketch which he

had written 'of the rise and progress of the Unitarian controversy,' but forbore to publish, 'the rightful position was assigned to the General Repository, as the advance-guard of Unitarianism proper." What he meant by the words 'Unitarianism proper' I do not understand; nor do I conceive him to have had any distinct meaning in his own mind. No work, in opposition to what its writer regarded as prevailing errors concerning religion, could have less connection than the Repository with any thing that may be called 'Unitarianism proper,' unless by this term be meant simply Antitrinitarianism, — a sense which, as appears from the connection in which it stands, could not reasonably be intended. The common use of the words 'Unitarians' and 'Unitarianism,' to denote a sect and the opinions of that sect, was, I think, introduced among those who had before been called 'liberal Christians,' by Mr. Channing, through his Letter to Mr. Thacher, published in 1815. The Orthodox had endeavored to fix that name on liberal Christians invidiously, for the purpose of confounding them with the English Unitarians of that time, and of making them responsible for all the speculations of members of that body. Mr. Channing, though recognizing it as an ambiguous term, and remonstrating against the use made of it by the Orthodox, and carefully defining that by Unitarianism he meant only Antitrinitarianism, yet adopted the appellation as the distinctive name of those in whose defence he was writing. In a note to this Letter, he explains that he regarded the name 'liberal Christians' as too assuming; 'because the word *liberality* expresses the noblest qualities of the human mind.' That name, however, had been familiarly applied by the Orthodox to their opponents, without any intention either of complimenting them or of sneering at them.

"The name 'Unitarian' gradually became prevalent among

us, and those by whom it was assumed combined into a sect. They thus quitted the high ground on which they had stood, or might have stood, in company with the good and wise, the philosophers of different ages and different denominations, — with such men as Erasmus, and Grotius, and Locke, and Le Clerc, who, according to their light, opposed the religious errors prevailing round them, and were 'the liberal Christians' of their day. They exchanged this for a connection with the English Unitarians as they then existed; and, notwithstanding the credit conferred on that sect by the eminent talents and great virtues of Priestley, and the sturdy honesty of Belsham, this connection was an unfortunate one. They were obliged continually to explain, that they were not to be held responsible, either for the metaphysical doctrines, or for many of the religious sentiments, of its more conspicuous members, — that they agreed with them only in being Antitrinitarians. There are times in which religious truth is exposed to particular persecution and obloquy, when it may be well for its defenders to combine into a sect for mutual encouragement and support. But the pressure from without must be great to render it advisable. The combination implied in the formation of a religious sect at the present day, with a distinctive name, is attended with great evils. It is, however, favored by many, through their love of sympathy, and from the excitement of party feeling, or because, as members or zealots of a sect, they may attain to a consideration which, standing alone, they could not possess. But religious truth, the great means of improving the condition of mankind, is not to be ascertained and made efficacious through the combination of men into religious parties, though its influence may be greatly impeded by such combinations.

"The name of 'Unitarians,' to whatever honor it had

been raised by the persecuted 'Polish Brotherhood,' the *Fratres Poloni*, in the seventeenth century, was an unfortunate name to be assumed in the beginning of the nineteenth by a sect among us. It was explained as denoting merely a disbelief of the doctrine of the Trinity, and as including all (that is, as was then meant, all *Christians*) who rejected that doctrine, whatever might be their differences of opinion respecting the language of Scripture which has been supposed to relate to it. But, were Christian sects at the present day to be founded at all, it must be bad to found them on disbelief, and especially, as in the present case, on the disbelief of a particular doctrine, — that of the Trinity. It is giving this doctrine a solitary place of preëminence among a multitude of other errors all linked together, and some of them equally, or even far more, disastrous. The ill consequences of a name of such indefinite comprehensiveness, and so easily abused, when this name is assumed by a religious party, were not at once perceived. But they have become conspicuous. When a Unitarian was first spoken of among us, a unitarian Christian, as I have said, was meant. But the adjunct 'unitarian' has succeeded, to a great extent, in dispossessing the substantive 'Christian' of its power; and the Christian Unitarians among us have in consequence found themselves brought into strange fellowship with unbelievers and pantheists.

"But I am unwilling to conclude with the few sentences last written. What is now wanting to the progress and influence of rational religion among us is a revival of the feeling of the importance of religious truth, — a practical conviction of the fact, which, however obvious and indisputable, does not seem to be generally recognized, that it is only by religious truth that religious errors, with all their attendant evils, can be done away; and of a fact equally obvious, that,

in the present conflict of opinions, minds disciplined in habits of correct reasoning and informed by extensive learning, minds acquainted with the different branches of theological science, which embraces or touches upon all the higher and more important subjects of thought, are required for the attainment and communication of religious truth. In one word, it is learned and able theologians that are wanted, — such men as Mr. Buckminster."

A DEFENCE

OF

LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY.

Among Protestant Christians there are two principal parties, which have been denominated with no great propriety of language the orthodox and the liberal. Between such, however, as may be decisively ranked in either party, the whole interval is filled by men, whose different opinions, some more resembling those of the one side, and some those of the other, may supply every shade in the gradation. But, though the limits of neither division can be accurately defined, and though in each are comprehended men who differ much in belief and sentiments from one another, yet there are some general characteristics of each division, which are sufficiently distinguishable. Those are to be considered as liberal Christians, who believe that Christianity, in respect to its main design, is a

revelation from God; a revelation of religious truths beyond all comparison more important and interesting, than what unenlightened reason can with any approach to certainty discover; a revelation of the being and moral government of God, of the immortality of man, of the purpose of the present life, of the character here to be formed, and of our condition in a future state as depending on our present conduct. There are many, indeed, to be considered as liberal Christians, who, believing that Christianity is in its main design a revelation, do yet believe that there are other important purposes of this dispensation. The orthodox, on the contrary, do not consider Christianity in respect to its principal purpose as a revelation of any kind, but as a scheme by which mankind, created with natures so corrupt as never to perform the will of God, and therefore justly exposed to his wrath and the severest punishments, and utterly impotent to do any thing to deliver themselves from this condition, are now, through the sufferings and death of Christ, put into such a state, that the mercy of God is offered to all and extended to some individuals. They believe that these views of human nature and of Christianity were taught by Christ and his Apostles together

with other doctrines, some of them mysterious and incomprehensible, which are not to be examined by the principles of natural reason, but in the reception of which our reason is to humble itself before our faith; and they for the most part consider the reception of these doctrines as essential,—as being the only foundation of the Christian character. The modes of interpretation which these two classes of Christians apply to the Scriptures likewise form characteristic differences. The orthodox, believing the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles to have been composed under God's immediate and miraculous superintendence, for the immediate purpose of being used and easily understood by all Christians in all countries and in all ages, of course apply to writings of so peculiar a character a mode of interpretation very different from what is applied to any other. They believe that no allowance is to be made for the inadvertence of the writer, and none for the exaggeration produced by strong feelings. They pay but little attention to that use of language, common in all human compositions, according to which the insulated meaning of words is not to be considered, and their true meaning is that which is defined by their connection, by some other known circum-

stance, or by the reason of the thing. They do not expect to find the meaning much disguised by peculiarities of expression characteristic of the writer, or of the age or country to which he belonged; they pay but little regard to the circumstances in which he wrote, or to those of the persons whom he addressed; and they are not ready to believe that writings, expressly intended for the general use of all Christians, should be much occupied by controversies which prevailed only in the first ages of the Church. Liberal Christians, on the contrary, believe that attention should be paid to all these particulars; and, while they regard the Christian Scriptures as the writings of men instructed by Christ himself, or by immediate revelation, in the nature and design of Christianity, they yet consider that the same modes of criticism and explanation are to be applied to these Scriptures as to all other ancient writings.

The two classes of Christians of which we speak regard each other with different feelings, partly from the very nature of their opposite opinions, and partly, perhaps, from the temper and disposition, or from the habits of thinking and investigation, which may in the one and in the other lead to the adoption of these opin-

ions. A liberal Christian is disposed fully to acknowledge the piety, the religious earnestness, and the services to God and man, of some of his opponents. However erroneous he may think their religious opinions, he has no disposition to call in question their motives or their sincerity. But he will hardly expect in return, that even such men should be able very fairly to estimate, or ready very warmly to praise, the at least equal virtues of some of those who think very differently from them.

Various charges have of course been brought against liberal Christians, some of which it is our intention to examine. The first we shall notice is, that, if our opinions be true, Christianity is something of small value; that it reveals nothing but what might be discovered, and what had been discovered, by unassisted reason; that the heathen philosophers had correct notions of God and a belief of a future state; and that it is not supposable that God should make a revelation merely for the purpose of teaching what he had enabled us by our natural faculties to discover. To this objection it may be replied, that there is a very great difference between believing certain truths to be the most important principles of action, truths which ought to influence and regulate the

whole of life, and this upon evidence which leaves no painful uncertainty, and considering the same truths merely as speculative opinions, for which it would be a very pleasant thing to find evidence, and in favor of which we may think there is an over-balance of probabilities. This was the state of some of the ancient philosophers in respect to the doctrine of a future life. With regard to the unity and character of God, we believe that not much is to be found in what they have left us of their opinions, which, when properly understood, may be brought to prove that they had a correct idea of one supreme and infinite Being. But these are points which in relation to our present purpose are not worth contesting. If it could be maintained, that the ancient philosophers had as correct notions concerning God, the future state, and man's immortality, as we may derive from Christianity, still the value of our religion would not, in our view, be sensibly diminished. Before this can be done, it must be proved that the doctrine of a future state of retribution had some considerable influence, we do not say on the generality of men before the introduction of Christianity, but on the generality of men in the most enlightened heathen nations; it must be proved

that this principle was a motive and a restraint, regulating their course of life in a considerable proportion of men; it must be proved, not that there were a few solitary individuals who had correct notions of God, which they did not dare publicly to communicate (we are not now ready to believe that there were such individuals); not that correct notions of God anywhere generally prevailed (we do not ask for the proof of any thing so absurd as this); but that there was some considerable hope, some reasonable expectation, that such notions would generally prevail without the aid of revelation. When these things are proved, and when we are further convinced, that the effects of Christianity, considered as a revelation, have been much less than we now estimate them, and that there is no such vast difference as we believe between those nations where it now prevails with some approach to its proper influence, and the most civilized nations of antiquity; or that this difference is to be ascribed principally to some other cause than the reception of those doctrines, the teaching of which we regard as its essential purpose; when we consider all this as established, we may then doubt, not of the truth of Christianity, but of the inestimable value we now assign to it.

The end of all religion is to make men better. Now there is no motive which can be compared, in its influence upon the moral conduct of men, with the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments. Where this exists, it gives strength and efficacy to every other proper principle; and, where it is wanting, no great effects are to be expected from any other motive of a moral or religious nature. It is a motive, which is alike applicable to the minds of all men; but it can only be brought to act upon the minds of men, when it rests for support on express revelation. If, therefore, the disclosure of this future state had been its single purpose, we do not think that Christianity would have been at all unworthy of all that ceremony of preparation in the Jewish economy by which it was preceded, and of all that splendor of miracles by which its descent on earth was accompanied. We do not think that even this single purpose would have been unworthy of his mission, one of whose last and most solemn declarations concerning himself was, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the Truth."

We proceed to notice another charge against liberal Christians similar to the one we have

been considering. It has been said, that there is no difference between them and a sober and rational infidel, who believes the being, the providence, and moral government of God, and a future state; such a one, for instance, as Lord Herbert of Cherbury. To this it may be replied, in the first place, that such instances are rare; and that the reception of what we regard as the doctrines of revelation is not often to be met with, unconnected with the reception of revelation itself. Lord Herbert was an extraordinary man, a man forced off and driven away from Christianity by what we consider as the corruptions by which in his time it was surrounded. If, however, there be any man, who has honestly sought after the truth without finding it, and who, relying upon natural religion alone, has devoted himself to the love and service of God, and trusts in his mercy, and looks forward to immortality, — if there be any such man, we are not solicitous to point out distinctions between him and ourselves, for the purpose of showing that he has less reason than we have to hope for the mercy of our common Father. But we do not mean to dismiss the objection with this answer. That there is no difference between a liberal Christian and an unbeliever,

is one of those loose and undefined propositions, whose want of truth may not be perceived by him who urges it, on account of its indistinctness of meaning. If it be meant, that there is no difference in respect to moral goodness, and that the rejection of the peculiar doctrines of our opponents is as culpable as the rejection of Christianity, we may assent to this, when we are convinced, first, that these doctrines are true; next, that their evidence is as clear and satisfactory as that of revelation itself; and, lastly, that they are in the highest degree important, so as to make the obligation as binding, on all those who doubt, to examine their evidence, as to examine that of revelation. If it be meant, that an unbeliever may receive what we consider the great principles of religion with such an assent as to produce in him as strong dispositions to perform his duty to God and man as exist in any liberal Christian, we answer, that in the present state of light and knowledge we do not think it a probable case; but if it be a supposable one, it is likewise supposable, that such an unbeliever should in this respect be on an equality with an orthodox Christian; and that for ourselves, to take the example which may be brought against us, we do not think that Lord

Herbert was inferior in Christian charity to Calvin, or in truth and honesty to Beza, or in real piety and holiness to either. If it be meant, and this seems to be the only meaning which remains, that there are no essential differences of belief between a rational unbeliever and a liberal Christian; we answer, that there is at first sight a difference, which in the age of the Apostles was considered essential, that the one "confesses with his mouth the Lord Jesus, and believes in his heart that God raised him from the dead," and that the other makes no such confession and has no such belief; we answer, that there is a most important difference between him who believes that Christianity is a revelation from heaven, together with all the consequences of this belief, and him who considers it as a system of fraud and folly, and admits all the consequences of this opinion; between him who believes Jesus Christ to have been a messenger from God, and to have given by far the highest example of moral excellence ever exhibited to mankind, and him who has at best no definite notions respecting his character, and who can with reason and consistency regard him as nothing better than an impostor or enthusiast; between him who believes that God has never ceased to manifest his care for

men, and that, by various dispensations adapted to the different ages of the world, he has been preserving the knowledge of himself, and preparing them for his final dispensation of Christianity, and him who believes that God has cast the world from his hand and left us to ourselves, to the guidance of that reason which is so easily deceived, so various and opposite in its decisions, so weak to enforce its dictates, and which, without the assistance of revelation, is so full of hesitation and uncertainty upon our most important concerns.

But we are accused, to proceed to another charge, of being remiss and indifferent in our regard to religion. If it be so, it is not the fault of our principles. With him to whom our religion affords no motives to holiness, and no objects to interest and elevate his affections, all motives and all objects must be in vain. There can be none more interesting, there can be none higher and more awful.

There is, indeed, a display of regard for religion, sometimes ostentatious, and sometimes offensive, which we believe is much more rarely to be found in liberal Christians than in others. But he must have little acquaintance with human nature, who does not know that the affectation of any virtue is one of

the worst proofs of its existence. It is not common for a man of humanity and benevolence to talk much of his humane and benevolent feelings, nor for a man of courage to assume the air of a braggart, nor for a man of honesty and truth to make professions of his honesty and assertions of his veracity. The case in respect to religion is indeed somewhat different from what it is in respect to the social virtues; as it is not so strongly as these supported by the opinion of the world. It becomes, therefore, the duty of men of virtue and influence, a duty very different from that ostentatious display of which we have been speaking, openly to profess their respect for it, and on various occasions of life in a particular manner to manifest this respect. In the performance of this duty we do not know that liberal Christians can be charged with being less faithful than others.

But we do not, it has been said, make religion a common subject of conversation. By this we understand to be meant, not that we refrain from conversing about its evidences, its doctrines, or the subjects of critical inquiry connected with it, in society where such subjects may properly be introduced; but that we do not discourse about our religious feelings

and affections, and concerning the truths of religion with particular application to ourselves or those with whom we are conversing. To this we answer, that there are subjects not to be talked of except in a very serious state of mind, and with an immediate sense of their importance; and that we do not think the hours of innocent gaiety and relaxation the most proper time for the introduction of such subjects. There would be much danger of their losing their solemnity and their awfulness, if too frequently or familiarly introduced. It is offensive to a man of correct mind to make his deepest feelings and his strongest affections a subject of common discourse, to borrow the fire of the altar for the common uses of life. He who commanded us to enter into our closets to pray, did not intend that we should come forth to announce with what dispositions we may have performed the duty. For that man, therefore, we should feel the highest respect, whose conversation should be habitually regulated by religion and morality; who should imply his sense of their obligations much oftener than he directly expressed it; who should be always ready to converse on those subjects which require the most serious state of mind, when his advice, his

warnings, his encouragement, or his consolation might be of any value; but who for the most part in the common intercourse of life should "silent let his morals tell his mind."

Before it is attempted to confound liberal Christians with unbelievers, and before they are accused of indifference to Christianity, it may be worth while to inquire, who have been its most able and satisfactory advocates. There are none who in this respect are to be placed in the same rank with Grotius, Butler, Lardner, Paley, and Priestley. With regard to Bishop Butler, we do not mean to quote his authority in support of our belief, nor do we feel the less respect for his character because we do not assent to all his opinions. If his name should be denied us, however, it cannot be claimed by our opponents. We believe that his works are read and their high value felt by none more than by liberal Christians; and this could not be, if his views of religion in what is most essential and important were different from theirs. With regard to the others whom we have mentioned, we suppose there will be little dispute respecting the class in which they are to be reckoned.

We have no doubt, that what we consider the corruptions of Christianity are the cause of

unbelief in some, and of indifference and inattention to religion in many. There are those, who, partially feeling the force of the evidences of our religion, are unable to reconcile themselves to what have been taught them as its doctrines, and, having never properly examined any other views of it, do in a great measure dismiss the subject from their minds. Our opponents will call this the dislike of corrupt human nature to the truth; we shall call it the repulsion of our reason and our natural feelings to their doctrines. These men, whom their doctrines have thus alienated from Christianity, we wish to reconcile to our religion, and make rational and consistent Christians; but for their indifference, or their infidelity, we are not accountable.

Another charge against liberal Christians is, that they reduce religion to a mere system of morals, that they teach and regard as essential nothing more than a worldly and pagan morality. If it be true, that we teach morality, and regard it as essential, it is praise which we shall not willingly relinquish. It is true, that we have no respect for that religion, which, where the means of doing good exist, does not manifest itself in a life of usefulness; which does not prompt to continual exertion, not to

any violent and irregular startings off from our proper sphere, for the purpose of some extraordinary course of action, which the world may wonder at, but to a patient, regular, faithful, unostentatious discharge of daily, and it may be humble duties. The religion which we respect does not produce any temporary, unnatural excitement of feelings, which may, or may not, have a very little to do with personal holiness; but it forms habits of virtue and self-control, it restrains the passions, it regulates the temper, and it produces throughout the whole character a gradual but constant progress in excellence. It has no sectarian air, no habitual look of gloom and repulsion, no assuming of censorship and superiority; but it mingles in the world, and sheds a beneficial and improving influence on all around, and regulates in its possessor, either directly or as a more remote principle, all his actions toward his fellow-creatures.

It is true, also, that we regard with thorough dislike the manner in which a virtuous and religious life, or, to use language that, however proper in itself, may recall the barbarous jargon of technical theology, in which *good works* are spoken of in the creeds of Calvinism and in the writings of men of this belief. We

think, that the sentiments to which we refer in these creeds and writings are not less hostile to morality, than the doctrines with which they are connected are injurious to religion. There is nothing to which our irregular passions will not sooner submit, than to the uniform observance of those rules of piety and virtue, which never intermit their authority, and never relax their obligation; but there is no difficulty in forming an alliance between religion and the passions, if the former can be understood as not directly connected with this observance. One cause of the prevalence of almost all the corruptions of Christianity is the desire to substitute something else instead of personal holiness; to make something different from this the foundation of our hope of God's mercy. To this cause we may attribute the penances, pilgrimages, ceremonies, and indulgences of the Romish church, which have been made substitutes for a good life; and to the same indisposition to consider this as essential we may ascribe, in a considerable degree, the doctrines of imputed sin and imputed righteousness, of a nature thoroughly corrupt, during whose existence we can perform no good action, and of its miraculous renovation, after which we cannot finally fall away, and, above all, the manner

of speaking before referred to, respecting a virtuous life. Let us not, however, be misunderstood. We do not confound the general cause of the prevalence of certain doctrines with the particular cause of their reception by many individuals, nor the natural tendency of those doctrines with their actual operation. We have no doubt that there are Catholics and Calvinists who would insist strongly on the necessity of habitual virtue.

These views of religion and of the doctrines of Calvinism are what probably have given occasion to the charge we are noticing, which is made, we suppose, with very little attention to its force or meaning. If there be any one who seriously thinks it true, — who thinks that we regard no other duties than those of man to man, and rely on no other motives to virtue than what the present life affords; that we believe in God with somewhat more delightful views, we suppose it must be confessed, of his nature and moral government, than what many other Christians entertain, and yet regard him with no love, nor reverence, nor fear, and do not make this belief the foundation of all virtue and of all hope; that we believe Jesus Christ to have been the messenger of God, and yet view his perfect character with no admira-

tion, and his labors and sufferings with no gratitude; that we believe in a future life of happiness and misery, and yet regard its most awful sanctions with indifference; — if there be any one who thinks all this true, we suppose no attempt could be more hopeless, than the attempt to undeceive him.

But, to notice another charge, it is said that we deprive religion of all its doctrines which may give joy or consolation, that our principles afford no hope in life and no comfort in death. Some doctrines we reject, which we should think not fruitful of joy and consolation, and which we believe have driven many persons sincerely good to gloom and despondency, and some to melancholy and madness; and such consequences we should suppose they would naturally produce, we do not say in a common mind, but in a mind of sensibility, of proper affections, and in the habit of thinking seriously on religious subjects. If it be thought, however, that our views of the present condition of men are little adapted to promote happiness or virtue, we may compare them with those to which they are opposed. We believe that man is a being possessed of powers, which he may abuse, and which it is morally impossible that he should not in some

instances abuse, before he has formed habits of exercising them aright; and of passions, whose natural tendency to excess is to be restrained by experiencing the ill effects of this excess in himself, or witnessing them in others. We believe that his highest happiness consists in the right exercise of these powers, and the proper indulgence of some of these passions. Of this highest happiness, therefore, he is of course incapable, till he has formed habits of virtue, that is, of properly exercising his powers, and habits of self-control, that is, of properly restraining his passions. For the formation of these habits, we believe the present life to be a state of discipline admirably adapted. If these habits be here formed, we believe that he will be removed to a better state of existence, adapted to his improved nature, where we think it is the doctrine of reason and of revelation, that his faculties will be continually enlarging, and new objects be continually presented to his intellect and his affections. If, on the contrary, habits of irregularity and vice be formed, he cannot be happy. The whole order of nature must first be reversed. As to his future state, we leave it in the same terrible uncertainty in which it is left by revelation. Now to this view, which

represents all men as made capable of obtaining, through the mercy and love of their common Father, eternal blessedness, and made capable of continual progress in happiness and virtue, what is opposed so much more joyful and consolatory? A scheme before noticed, which represents all mankind, since our first parents, as created by God with natures so corrupt as to be able to do nothing to save themselves from eternal misery. We use the mildest language possible; that of the creeds and confessions is, that mankind are under "God's displeasure and curse; so as we are by nature children of wrath, bond-slaves to Satan, and justly liable to all punishments in this world and that which is to come. And the punishments in the world to come are everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God and most grievous torments in soul and body without intermission in hell-fire for ever." * From this terrible condition a part of mankind are saved through the atonement of Christ. They are chosen from among the rest, not because they are better than those who are left, nor with reference to any works or endeavors of their own, but out of God's

* Westminster Assembly's Larger Catechism.

mere good pleasure. We give the doctrine of the creeds; some may choose to affirm that this election is not with any certain and natural reference to their own endeavors, but may shrink from the assertion of more hardy orthodoxy, that good actions performed by unregenerate men are sinful.* Those who are thus chosen are made regenerate, that is, their natures undergo a miraculous renovation, and they become fit for heaven. Those who are left perish everlastingly, without possibility of escape. We shall make no comment upon this scheme, nor urge the comparison that we have mentioned. We will only observe, that we suppose there are some men, who receive what is most essential in it, who yet may be shocked at the horrible absurdity of language in which parts of it are sometimes expressed. Let such men define their notions, and see how far they do in fact differ from the original doctrines.

But it may be said, that he, who, according to the scheme just mentioned, believes, or, as some will have it, knows, himself to be one of the elect, must have a much more joyful confidence in God's peculiar love and mercy,

* *Good actions*, that is to say, "works that for the matter of them may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others." — Westminster Assembly's Confession of Faith, Ch. XVI. § 7.

than any one can enjoy upon our principles. It may be so. The best of us can have no more confidence than what the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews possessed, and can only say with him, "We trust we have a good conscience." We can have no more assurance than St. Paul enjoyed, when he told the Corinthians of his care "lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should become a castaway." We can have no other confidence than what arises from the testimony of our consciences, and a perfect trust in the impartial mercy of God; and, if there be those who possess any other, we think it built on a very fallacious foundation, and suppose that it is for the most part somewhat wavering and uncertain.

If our religion be the guide of our life, we have no fear that she will desert us in its trials and sorrows, or that her aid will be ineffectual for our support. The companion of our prosperity will make adversity a lesson of virtue, and enable us to bear it with resignation, and perhaps with cheerfulness. And in that hour when we shall have no other support, and no other availing comforter, she will not fail us. Through her influence the visions of immortality, to which in life she has directed our eyes, will grow brighter and more distinct around

our death-bed, as all other objects are receding. We have no envy for him who can speak of her as wanting in joy, or poor in consolation. We desire only, that we may be more worthy of her joys and consolations, and feel a more profound gratitude to Him from whom she has descended.

But, whatever may be the character or the influence of our opinions, it is still further urged against us, that these opinions are supported by unnatural constructions of Scripture, by rejecting the plain sense and substituting a forced meaning in its place. If by the plain sense of the Scriptures be meant that which would first occur to a person educated in the belief of certain doctrines, which liberal Christians consider no part of Christianity, and reading them in an English translation without any knowledge of the original language, or any collateral learning to assist in the right understanding of them, then, as to a considerable part of the Scriptures, the charge is to be admitted. Whether or not it will be a very serious one is a further question; and whether or not this should be considered the plain sense of Scripture depends in a considerable degree on the decision of the question, which of the two modes of interpretation formerly mentioned

is preferable. To one reading the Scriptures in the manner we have mentioned, an unjustifiable construction may appear to be put upon many passages, which have long been forced into the support of theological systems, when they are only restored to their true and natural meaning. But, supposing it to be granted that the Christian Scriptures are to be studied in the same manner as all other ancient writings, and that a variety of ancient learning is to be brought to their elucidation, a knowledge of Jewish and heathen antiquities, of the language in which they were written, and of this language as affected by the modes of Oriental and Jewish phraseology, of Jewish opinions, of the controversies which prevailed in the time of the Apostles, and of all those other circumstances which may tend to explain the general design of the different writings and the particular meaning of single passages; — granting that this is to be done, if then it be affirmed, that we reject what in this mode of study may appear the plain sense of Scripture, we deny the charge. But we do more; we contend that our opinions are supported by the plain sense and the general tenor of Scripture, such as it will appear to the most illiterate, if at the same time he be an unprejudiced reader. We con-

tend, that the doctrines of our opponents are contradicted by the general meaning of Scripture, and are apparently supported only by a few detached passages. Let us take, for example, that doctrine which places Jesus Christ on an equality with the God and Father of us all. By the removal of a very few passages we might leave a volume not sensibly diminished in bulk, in no part of which would this doctrine find any support, and to many parts of which it would appear altogether contradictory. If we take, for another example, the doctrine of the total impotence of man and irresistible grace, we may go through the New Testament, and, with not many strokes of the pen blotting out every passage in which it can be pretended that this doctrine finds support, we shall leave a body of doctrines, and precepts, and promises, and exhortations, and threatenings, to which it will appear wholly irreconcilable. It is in the explanation of those difficult and perverted passages which seem to give countenance to such doctrines, difficult because they have been so long perverted, that one of the principal uses of the critical study of the Scriptures consists.

But it may be further objected, that, if we are in the right, the Church, the great ma-

jority of Christians, has been for ages in error. Be it so. For how many ages, we may ask in reply, has the Church been confessedly in error? Will any Protestant pretend, that Christianity existed among the great majority of Christians in any degree of purity from the end of the fourth century to the Reformation, a period of a thousand years? During this long period the articles of belief taught and received for its doctrines were such, as show to what debasement and prostration the human mind may be reduced, and how entirely the resistance of reason to any modes of faith may be subdued. During this period the superstitions of paganism were reinstated under other names in the temples of God. The proper influence of Christianity could not be wholly prevented, nor could its restoring power, its tendency to revive and purify itself, be at any time entirely hindered from acting; but its authority was falsified to minister to public and private wickedness; the religion of humility, benevolence, and purity was represented as being in league with ambition, cruelty, and lust, and affording them her support. During all this period the light of the moral world was "in dim eclipse, shedding disastrous twilight." For so long a time, at least, the authority of the Church is not of value enough to be urged against us.

We will give a very brief account of what we consider the causes of those errors that have been connected with Christianity, and that have at times almost hidden from view the few simple and sublime truths, which it was its purpose to reveal. To him who considers the state of the world at the time of the introduction of Christianity, it will appear a thing to have been expected beforehand, that, when it should no longer be under the immediate care of our Saviour and his Apostles, it would very soon be mingled with much error and absurdity in the minds of those by whom it was embraced. Mankind were not in a state to receive without corrupting it a religion so simple and so spiritual. With regard to God, the realities of another life, and the character which our religion requires, the mass of men had neither ideas nor feelings; and even in respect to the social virtues it inculcates, their notions were very erroneous and inadequate. But every one conversant with such subjects may be able, in some degree, to comprehend how difficult it is to introduce into the mind an entirely new class of ideas and feelings, especially if they relate to spiritual objects; how imperfectly these objects are discerned till the mind has become habituated to their contemplation;

how much all ideas concerning them are debased and mingled with former sentiments; and how readily the mind recurs to its prior associations, and relapses into its old habits of thought and feeling. It may be easily believed, therefore, that the Gentile converts did not immediately comprehend all that our religion teaches; that they were not free from the influence of their former associations and habits, and that they were not at once transformed from ignorant heathens into enlightened Christians. If a thing so probable in itself be in need of extrinsic proof, it may be shown to have been the case from many passages in the writings of the Apostles. That the Jewish converts connected with Christianity every thing in their ancient prejudices and opinions, which could be united with it, and that, if unresisted, they would have introduced into it some very gross corruptions, appears also very fully from the Scriptures themselves. There were likewise in this early age other errors of no small magnitude, whose origin we cannot so clearly trace. Some, for instance, taught, that the resurrection was already past,* and others wrested (we know not cer-

* 2 Tim. ii. 18.

tainly in support of what false doctrines) the epistles of St. Paul, as well as the Jewish Scriptures.* If such dispositions to alter and to add to our religion existed in the times of the Apostles, it is probable that they would operate with much more force as soon as the immediate personal authority of the Apostles was removed, and men's minds were no longer subdued by the visible display of miraculous powers.

But it is not wholly nor principally to the lower class of Christians, that we are to look for the origin of those errors which have been connected with Christianity. We are to refer the greater part of them to the learned and philosophizing converts; and corruptions from this source seem to have shown themselves nearly as soon as from the former. Some of the heathen philosophers deserted their schools for the temples of Christianity, but they did not leave behind them their former opinions, and they could not leave behind them their former habits of mind. With what they now learnt they mingled much of what they had before been accustomed to teach. With their ideas of Christianity they incorporated some-

* 2 Peter iii. 16.

what of their former philosophy; they endeavored to discover resemblances between its doctrines and those they had lately held, and to conform them as far as possible to each other. This, which from the very constitution of the mind they would naturally have done, they had a further inducement to do from the desire to recommend to others the religion they had themselves received, by representing it as analogous to modes of faith already existing, and to systems of opinion already held in respect. It was doing the same thing, though probably with a less explicit acknowledgment to themselves of the principle of their conduct, as the Roman Catholic missionaries have since been accustomed to do, in attempting the conversion of pagan nations to Christianity. A principal source of the errors which they introduced seems to have been a desire to elevate the character of our Saviour, and to make it such as they thought would be more respected by the world. The strength of the motive to this ill-directed ambition cannot be estimated by one who does not recollect how much offence it must have given to the pride of rank and learning, that the Founder of our religion suffered as a malefactor; that its Apostles were in general taken from the lower class of men,

and were continually exposed to those sufferings with which disgrace is usually associated; and that it had its origin in a nation whom the rest of the world hated and despised.

The Christian Fathers would less readily have fallen into the errors of which we have spoken, if they had been better skilled to understand the Scriptures. But, partaking before their conversion, and even in a considerable degree afterwards, of the common feelings of the heathen world towards the Jews, they were not much disposed to make what related to that people an object of particular study. The language in which the books of the Old Testament were written, if they acquired it at all, which very few did, they acquired imperfectly after becoming Christians. They were in a great degree ignorant of the opinions of the Jews, their prejudices, their pretensions, their controversies, their habits and manners, and their modes of phraseology. But without this knowledge many parts of the Christian Scriptures, and especially the Epistles of St. Paul, cannot be correctly understood. They were likewise introduced at once to all the new ideas connected with a new religion, and to all the new modes of expression in which these were of necessity conveyed; and these

ideas and expressions existed in writings, which were in a dialect different from any thing to which they had been accustomed, in its forms of construction and in the signification of language, using Greek words with a Hebrew idiom; so that those to whom Greek was their common language were perhaps nearly as much perplexed as assisted, in the study of the Scriptures, by their knowledge of it as spoken or written by heathen nations.

Disqualified as the Christian Fathers thus were, the Scriptures could hardly have fallen into the hands of worse interpreters; and many of their explanations of different passages, of those adduced by them in support of their doctrines as well as others, have accordingly been the wonder and ridicule of succeeding commentators. In the Scriptures thus imperfectly understood they were never at a loss for arguments. The meaning, which was so obscurely seen, was made to assume any form that fancy might choose to impose. They interpreted mystically and allegorically; and a passage, which in the sound of the words resembled a proposition in which they expressed some one of their doctrines, was not among the most contemptible arguments they brought to its support. They began contend-

ing together, and in their controversies they mutually drove each other further from the truth. The doctrines of the orthodox, however, or, in other words, of that party in these different controversies which finally prevailed, were established as the true faith, and continued to be the doctrines of the Church till the time of the Reformation. The reformers, when they broke off from the remaining body of Christians, left behind them many, but by no means all, of these doctrines. Many of them still prevail, together with many of the explanations and much of the general mode of interpreting Scripture, with which they were connected.

But why, it may be asked, — and the question is an important one, — why was not more resistance made, and made earlier, to errors, which we consider of so gross a nature, and connected with a subject of so much interest? We answer, in the first place, that the question does not concern us alone. Why, we may ask any Protestant in return, were what he will acknowledge to be gross errors suffered to prevail almost unresisted during the ten centuries before the Reformation? But we shall not content ourselves with this reply. We answer, that it may be, and that it has been, shown by

other writers, with regard to some of the most important errors which we oppose, that they had their origin among the learned and philosophizing Christian converts, and that they were not introduced without difficulty and without opposition from the great body of the unlearned, who had no prejudices in their favor; nor were they introduced at once, but gradually. But, from the period of their introduction till almost our own age, much further resistance could not be expected. At the time when Christianity began generally to be known, literature, and moral science, and true philosophy were all on the decline. Indeed, in the best days of antiquity there seems to have been but little of that manly reasoning in morals and in metaphysics, that power of treating abstract subjects, that vigor of mind that repels error and absurdity, which we may discover in later times. There is nothing of an intellectual nature, perhaps, in which the improvement of mankind is more apparent. We should seek in vain in any ancient writer for something resembling the reasonings of Butler, or the metaphysics of Locke. If such, then, was the general character of ancient times, there was no reason to expect that men would be much shocked in receiving established er-

rors and absurdities connected with Christianity, similar to those which their predecessors had received as making a part of their philosophy, especially as this was done in an age of still greater ignorance and less vigor of inquiry, than that in which this philosophy prevailed. There was nothing in the character of the times succeeding the reign of Constantine, previous to which some of the most important corruptions of Christianity had their origin, which would lead one to expect any powerful efforts of reason in opposing these or any other errors. Not long after his reign, the barriers of the Roman empire began to give way, and a flood of ignorance and barbarism poured in upon the civilized world. Then succeeded the ages when the despotism of superstition was confirmed, and all was passive under its sway.

This power was at last shaken. The minds of men, having been exercised about other objects, and recovering some degree of strength, began to react against the religious tyranny by which they were oppressed. The time of the Reformation arrived. The reformers freed Christianity from many of the errors with which it had been surrounded; but they left many unassailed, and they substituted errors of their own instead of those which they removed.

There are those who consider the doctrines of the Reformation as the standard of true belief; but to us it seems a thing little to be expected beforehand, that these should be found the pure doctrines of Christianity. It would have been an event without any parallel, if the reformers, educated in the belief of the prevailing superstitions and false doctrines of their age, and having them incorporated with all their religious principles and feelings, had been able, not merely to free themselves from some of these, but to cast them all off together, and in the struggle and laceration of their minds to examine and to discriminate all truth from all error; if, educated in the age and in the religion in which they were, they had possessed the most enlightened views, and been able to refer every thing to the most correct principles; if, while vehemently resisting some corruptions, to which their attention was particularly drawn, they had had leisure or disposition to turn aside and to consider all the other subjects connected with our religion, and to settle the most correct belief upon these also; if they had been willing at once to oppose themselves to later and to earlier errors; if, in setting themselves against the Church as it existed in their day, they had not wished to have in their favor, or

at least to render neutral, the authority of the Church in earlier times, and therefore felt little solicitude to determine whether she might not even then have departed from the simplicity of the Gospel; if they had had none of the very common fear of carrying their inquiries too far, and departing too much from the faith they had once held; or if, on the other hand, in the violence of that fierce controversy in which they were engaged, they had been able coolly and impartially to estimate all the arguments for and against the opinions they defended; if they had assumed no untenable positions; if they had never been driven or had never hurried over the bounds of truth; if they had never mistaken *the reverse of wrong* for *right*, and never opposed one error to another (the doctrine of irresistible grace, for instance, to the doctrine of merit); if, when men had just begun anew to study the Scriptures, in the infancy of scriptural criticism, they had anticipated all the advantages to be derived from this most important study, and rendered useless, or worse than useless, in respect to making known the true character of Christianity, the labors of so many eminent men, who have in succeeding times devoted their lives to the elucidation of the sacred writings; if, in fine,

receiving these writings, as we believe they did, incrusted over with a covering of false interpretations, which hid their original meaning from view, they had been able at once to discern the true character of our religion. The reformers were educated in error, they were engaged in violent controversies, and they lived in an age of comparative ignorance. We do not think the authority of such men of any value, to establish their doctrines as the standard of belief; we do not believe that the midnight darkness of superstition was at once succeeded by the noon-day splendor of truth; our philosophy teaches us to expect such changes as little in the moral as in the natural world.

From the time of the Reformation, we think that, by the progress of knowledge and of freedom of inquiry, the real character of Christianity has been more and more made known among Protestant nations; and we think we discern the influence of these more correct views of religion in the gradual but very perceptible improvement of these nations, during the last three centuries, in virtue and happiness, in a more established and more general sense of right and wrong, in a better regulated state of society, and in the cultivation of the humane and social affections. In comparing

the present character and condition of men in these nations with what it was in the most civilized countries at the time of the introduction of Christianity, we perceive the effects of our religion; and, in comparing the same present state of society with what it was two centuries ago, we perceive, as we think, the effects of a more improved knowledge of our religion. The more directly the few simple and most important truths of Christianity can be made to act on the minds of men without being impeded in their operation; the more men's attention is directed to these without being distracted and occupied by the false doctrines with which they have been connected; the more they can be taught to value themselves upon being Christians, and not upon being Christians of a certain sect; the more difficulty they find in mistaking the bitter feelings of a party for zeal in the cause of religion; the more those corruptions can be removed, whose tendency is to substitute something else for personal holiness; the more our religion can be freed from those additions of human weakness and folly, which have debased its character in the regard of some men, and men of powerful minds, by whom it might otherwise have been respected, and which have rendered many un-

believers, and many doubtful and indifferent, as to its truth; — the more all this can be done, the more powerful and universal will be its influence.

But, while we rejoice in the gradual progress of truth, we have no intemperate zeal for making proselytes. Though gratified, like the rest of the world, that others should think with us, we can be content that even some of those whom we personally love and respect should think differently. There are many, especially among the aged, whose belief we might think erroneous, but whose belief we should have no disposition to disturb. With it are intwined all their religious principles and affections, and the former could hardly be removed without shattering or destroying the latter. It is the lot of a great part of the world to receive their religious opinions upon authority; and, though there are many belonging to this class, whose opinions we might by no means esteem altogether true, yet we should not be very ready to lead them to doubt of the correctness of the authority in which they had confided, lest their distrust should extend to all they had been taught, and because we might not be able to substitute our own, instead of that authority which we had weakened or over-

turned. To such men we do not address ourselves, or we only address ourselves to say, that, if their faith has produced the fruits of good living, if it has shown itself in love to God and love to man, we have no question of its excellence and its sufficiency to salvation; we should be among the last of men to wish them to feel pain from any doubt of its correctness. Let it be remembered, however, that we say this only to humble and unobtrusive piety, and not to intolerant ignorance, which pretends to dogmatize, and to make its own opinions the standard of belief. On questions where wisdom, and learning, and piety must have decided wrong, because in different men they have given opposite decisions, it does not become any one, who has not spent some time and some thought in their examination, to intrude his opinions, and far less to pronounce his censures. There is an obligation upon every one, which we hope we do not forget, to examine, with very serious attention, the reasonableness of that faith which he himself holds, and which he would induce others to receive.

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DISCOURSE

ON THE

EXTENT AND RELATIONS OF THEOLOGY;

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY IN CAMBRIDGE

(NEW ENGLAND),

AUGUST 10, 1819,

ON ASSUMING THE DUTIES OF DEXTER PROFESSOR OF SACRED LITERATURE.

INAUGURAL DISCOURSE.

The liberality of our citizens, and especially of one distinguished individual,* who bore a name which has long been honored, and which I hope will long continue to be honored among us, having afforded new facilities for theological instruction in this University, an additional professorship has in consequence been founded. About to enter on the duties of this new office, I have thought that it would not be uninteresting or useless to speak of the extent and relations of the science of theology, or, in other words, of the intellectual acquisitions required to constitute a consummate theologian. I can, it is true, do little more than lead you to an eminence, and point out hastily the great features of the prospect which lies before us; but

* Samuel Dexter, the elder.

even this rapid view may not be altogether unprofitable.

In such a survey, it is in its relations to metaphysics, that theology may be first considered. It treats of God, and of man considered as an immortal being. Upon these subjects revelation has taught us truths the most important; and some of the noblest and most powerful efforts of human reason have been employed in deducing the same truths from the moral and physical phenomena by which we are surrounded. It is one part of the business of a theologian to make himself familiar with those reasonings by which the mind, now that it has been educated by Christianity, is able, even when trusting to its own powers and resources alone, to establish or render probable the truths of religion. He must become the interpreter of the works and providence of God, and qualify himself to perceive the harmony between the two revelations which God has given us; — that, which is made known by the laws governing the world, as they proceed in their regular operation; and that, of which the divine origin was attested by the presence of a power controlling and suspending those laws. He will find a perfect harmony between them; and will perceive that the evidences of both, though de-

rived from sources very remote from each other, flow together at last, and bear us on to one common object, — the truth of the essential principles of religion.

Yet, notwithstanding the strength of argument by which these principles are supported, we cannot but remark that our conclusions are embarrassed by some difficulties; and we know that scepticism has labored to overthrow all our reasonings. The theologian, in pursuing his inquiries respecting these difficulties and objections, if he be determined to follow them to the uttermost, will be obliged to go on to the very limits of human knowledge, — to the barriers beyond which our minds cannot pass. He must fix a steady attention upon ideas abstract, shadowy, and inadequate. Where the last rays begin to be lost in utter darkness, he must distinguish in the doubtful twilight between deceptive appearances and the forms of things really existing. He must subject to a strict scrutiny words and expressions which often deceive us, and often mock us with only a show of meaning. He must engage in difficult processes of reasoning, in which the terms of language, divested of their usual associations, become little more than algebraic symbols; and, in pursuing these processes, he must pro-

ceed with the greatest attention and accuracy, because a single false step may render his conclusions altogether erroneous.

The inquiries to which we are led by the objections of the sceptic are curious, and in some respects important. But they are not those in which a man of sound mind will habitually delight. He will pass from them to studies more satisfactory, and which have a more direct influence upon the conduct and happiness of men, with feelings similar to those of the voyager, who, having visited the wonderful regions of polar solitude, where the sun dazzles but does not fertilize, is returning to a mild, inhabited, and cultivated climate. No triumph over religion can be achieved by metaphysical scepticism till it has first undermined the foundations of all rational belief. The temple in which we worship is placed within the citadel of human reason; and, before it can be approached for the purpose of destruction, all knowledge not intuitive must have been surrendered. He who doubts the existence of God has left himself no truth, dependent on moral evidence, which he can reasonably believe.

We learn the character of God by a wide induction from the laws of his moral government, and from the objects and phenomena of the

physical world. Here, then, is another field of study opened to the theologian. We are surrounded by an unknown and immeasurable power, which is every moment producing motion and life, and manifesting itself by effects the most astonishing and admirable. We must study the character of this power in its works. We must borrow aid from that science which has "wheeled in triumph through the signs of heaven." We must enter the lecture-room of the anatomist, and learn how "fearfully and wonderfully we are made." And we must follow the student of nature to the fields, and woods, and waters, to rocks and mines, and inquire of the objects to which he directs us, what they can teach of their Maker. These studies are to be pursued, not merely as furnishing materials for argument, but because they awaken and render vivid our feelings of devotion. In contemplating the perfections of God without reference to his works, they present themselves to us as metaphysical abstractions, which in their obscurity and vastness mock our comprehension. But when we turn to his works, we perceive his power, wisdom, and goodness embodied, as it were, and rendered visible.

But our religious faith rests, for its main sup-

port, on what we believe to be the revelation of God through Jesus Christ. What, then, is the evidence that Jesus Christ was indeed the messenger of God? This inquiry is connected with the whole history of God's miraculous dispensations, and will lead the theologian to the study of all the evidence relating to these subjects.

Upon entering on this study, when he inquires what it is which is to be proved, he will find that a mass of statements and propositions, of very different importance, have been blended together; and his first object must be to distinguish and separate those, the truth of which it is indeed essential to maintain. His next purpose will be to make himself acquainted with the whole evidence by which these essential truths are to be defended, to view the subject in all its relations, and to become aware of every objection and difficulty. His faith must not be the offspring of prejudice and ignorance, confident only because it has not examined, and ready to think an insult a good answer to an objection; nor a timid and doubtful belief, always liable to be startled by some unexpected disclosure, the result of that state of mind in which one is who has proceeded in his inquiries only so far, as to perceive that much remains to be settled. The proof of the miraculous dis-

pensations of God consists in a series of the most remarkable phenomena, which, if we reject the belief of such interpositions, can be accounted for by no other causes; and which have marked the whole history of man with a track of light, like that of the rising sun on the ocean.

In making himself acquainted with the evidences of our religion, as they have been commonly stated, the theological student will perceive, that it is only a portion of its proof which has yet been collected and arranged; and that, in the most able works which we have on the subject, is to be found only an abridgment, or a passing notice, of many important arguments, while others are wholly omitted. In order to feel the full force of those arguments to which his attention is directly called, he must apply the results of his own inquiries to the statements which may be laid before him. We may take, as an example, the evidence for our religion which arises from the intrinsic divinity of its character. In order to estimate this evidence justly, we must compare our religion with the systems of philosophy and morals by which it was preceded. It was indeed an event wholly out of the sphere of natural causes, that one who had never entered the schools of human wisdom, who had lived all

his life in the midst of the gross ignorance, the inveterate prejudices, and the habitual and degrading vices of Galilean Jews, surrounded by a people scarcely, if at all, more cultivated and intellectual than those who now occupy the same land, — that such a one should make known a universal religion, the most pure, the most holy, and the most powerful to enlighten and bless mankind. But in order to feel in all its force how marvellous a thing this was, we must know how much, or rather how little, had been previously effected by the efforts of the wisest and most enlightened men. We must make ourselves acquainted with the moral and religious state of mankind, which preceded and was contemporary with the introduction of Christianity.

In considering the external evidences of our religion, regarded in connection with what Christianity really is, the theologian, if he be determined to view the subject in all its relations, will find himself conducted into the most difficult parts of ecclesiastical history, where there are guides enough, to be sure, but few whom he can safely trust; where he must compare the reports of one with those of another, and examine for himself, and rely upon his own judgment. And though the result will be, I trust, the full confirmation of his faith, yet the

opinions with which he concludes may not be altogether the same as those with which he commenced his inquiries.

When he comes to the study of the Scriptures, in proportion as he removes all the accumulated rubbish of technical theology, under which their meaning has been buried, and obtains a distinct view of it, he will discern new and very striking evidence of the truth of our religion. It is evidence, but a small portion of which has yet been distinctly presented by any writer. It arises from the agreement of the New Testament with itself, the coincidence and correspondence of its different parts, and its agreement with all our knowledge respecting the state of things which existed during the time of the first preaching of Christianity. The New Testament consists of different writings, comprising accounts of our Saviour's ministry, some account of the ministry of his Apostles, particularly of that of St. Paul, many discourses of the former, and various letters written by the latter and by other Apostles. The whole history which we here find is consistent with itself; and the discourses and letters are consistent with the history. They are so connected with the history, that, in very important particulars, they are liable to be wholly misunderstood without such a careful study of

it as may enable us to form a distinct conception of the particular occasion of their delivery or composition. These discourses and writings reflect, as it were, the ever-varying circumstances, which marked that most extraordinary state of things produced by the ministry of our Saviour and his Apostles. They have a relation throughout to the strong prejudices, the unfounded and extravagant expectations, the narrow conceptions, the limited knowledge, and the violent and vacillating passions, of those to whom they were addressed. Nor is the coincidence of which I speak confined to discourses and writings; it appears also in what was done by our Saviour and his Apostles. It is a correspondence of their words and actions to all that we know, or can reasonably infer, respecting the very peculiar circumstances in which they acted and taught. This correspondence appears throughout the New Testament, ramifying into numberless particulars, spreading everywhere, and binding all parts together. As we pursue our inquiries, it assumes at last a character so remarkable and decisive, as to put out of question the supposition of fiction in the history, or forgery in the writings. No artifice could approach toward giving such a perfect imitation of nature, with all its accidents, and

all its minute and latent characteristics. And why has not this internal evidence of the truth of our religion been more regarded? I answer, because the Scriptures have been for the most part so imperfectly understood; because their meaning has been seen blurred and distorted through the medium of gross theological errors.

The study of the Bible, and particularly of the New Testament, is, perhaps more than any other, the peculiar province of the theologian. In pursuing this study, he must acquaint himself with that collection of facts and rules, by the application of which the original text of the sacred writings is recovered as far as possible. He must be master of the languages in which they are written; an acquaintance with which should be one of the first, and will continue to be one of the last objects of his attention. He must be, in the most comprehensive sense of the word, a philologist. The meaning of Scripture is controverted in every part, and he must therefore be acquainted with the art of interpreting language, an art, of the very existence of which many of those, who have decided most confidently respecting the sense of the sacred writings, appear to have been wholly ignorant. To this end he must study the nature and constitution of language, generally, and as

it appears in different particular forms in which it has existed.

The interpretation of language is a subject which will lead him to one of the most curious and important branches of inquiry, one embracing the whole history of the revolutions and development of the human mind, and of the changes and accidents of human opinions and sentiments. In tracing this history, he must learn to mark with a practised eye the varying composition and changeable coloring of human ideas, which are continually forming new combinations of meaning, while the old disappear, to be expressed by the same unaltered words while the same language remains in use, or by words apparently correspondent in the languages which may succeed it. Words, as well as coins, change their value with the progress of society. By studying the character of language, the philologist and theologian will discover its intrinsic ambiguity and imperfection. He will learn, what has been but little attended to, that words regarded in themselves alone are often inadequate to convey any one definite meaning; and that the meaning, which the words themselves leave thus loose and unsettled, is to be fixed and defined by reference to extrinsic considerations. He will in conse-

quence perceive, that a mere critical knowledge of the languages in which the Scriptures are composed (and the same is true of other writings) is but the first step towards their explanation. In order to know, in any particular instance, what is the true meaning of words, it is often necessary to know under what circumstances and relations they were used in that particular instance. The theologian, therefore, will proceed to collect and arrange all that variety of facts and truths, in connection with which the language of the Scriptures must be viewed, in order to perceive its bearing and relations; and some one or more of which is continually entering as a principal element into all those reasonings by which its sense is determined. With these facts and truths he will make himself familiar. Without previous knowledge of this sort, the words of the Scriptures, or of any other ancient writing, will often convey as false ideas and impressions to the mind, as an historical picture might give to one wholly ignorant of the story which forms its subject.

I have said that the expositor of Scripture must be a philologist in the most extensive sense of the word. In order to this, he must have the feelings and imagination of a poet. Without these poetry cannot be understood.

Its interpreter must have the power of sympathizing with him by whom it is composed. The images and emotions of the writer must excite corresponding images and emotions in his own mind. The Old Testament is full of poetry; and, in the New Testament, the Oriental and popular style which prevails, often requires, no less than poetry itself, an acquaintance with all the uses of language, and with all the forms in which feeling, passion, and imagination express themselves, in order to distinguish and disengage the mere literal meaning from those images and ideas with which it is associated.

Another part of the business of a theologian is to trace the history of our religion, and its effects on the condition of society. In other words, he must be familiar with ecclesiastical history. In this study, one of the most interesting objects of attention will be the origin and progress of those errors, which have cast their shade over the Christian world, and intercepted the influence of the gospel. He will discover, that many of these errors belong to an earlier age than Christianity itself; and that their sources are to be found in the superstitions, and still more in the philosophy, which existed before our religion was preached to men. The converts to our faith did not yield

up their minds to its reception with an entire renunciation of every former belief and prepossession. They did not divest themselves of all former trains of thought and reasoning, and all former imaginations and sentiments. The light which spread over the world was mingled with the darkness which had before prevailed; and God did not, as in the beginning, divide the light from the darkness. Men received much that was true, but they also retained much that was false; and truth and falsehood grew up together, and constituted the religion which was professed. The past and present errors of Christians are many of them to be traced to a heathen origin, and especially to the heathen philosophy.

The theologian, therefore, who, in studying the evidences of our religion, had before been led to consider the previous condition, opinions, and character of mankind, will find himself conducted anew to the same subject by a different route, and brought to view it under a different aspect. The study of ancient philosophy lies before him. He must make himself familiar with forms of error, and modes of exhibiting truth, very different from those to which he has been accustomed. He must become, as it were, an inquisitive traveller in a

strange country, among men who use a new language; and he will see around him much, of which he cannot at once comprehend the reason, the origin, or the relations. The philosophy of every age has had a powerful influence upon the contemporary forms of religion professed among Christians. But it is of essential importance to be acquainted with that philosophy which prevailed when Christianity was first taught; because this, as I have said, was the parent of many of those errors which still exist, and which now, made hoary by time, are regarded with a veneration to which they are wholly without title.

In the study of ecclesiastical history, in order to estimate justly the facts and characters which it brings before us, a thorough knowledge of human nature is required. And this study, in its turn, may teach us more of the human character than perhaps any other. It will show us the best and the worst passions operated upon by the strongest motives. It will teach us to think at once more highly and more humbly of man, and discover to us all his strength, all his weakness, and all his inconsistency. It will show us the strange forms in which his virtues may appear, and the infamous disguises which his vices may assume. It will show us the

most remarkable and apparently the most heterogeneous combinations of moral and intellectual qualities. It will present to us, in every variety, those complex characters which it is so difficult to estimate; because they exhibit the worldly and selfish passions in alliance with religion, and it is hard to determine to what point the latter is debased, or how far the former may be modified by the connection; to what degree self-deception may exist, and how far it is to be admitted as an excuse; or how far the errors and vices of the age may be pleaded in apology for those of the individual. It will teach us, that even powerful minds may be paralyzed by the touch of superstition; that there is no depth of debasement to which the human understanding may not be reduced; and that there is nothing so unmeaning, so false, so shocking, or so self-contradictory, that it may not be received for divine truth.

But one of the most grateful studies of the theologian is to trace the real influence of the true principles of Christianity. He will rejoice to observe how much they have done to raise the character of man, and to improve the condition of society. Going back into past ages, and becoming, as it were, a citizen of Athens or of Rome, making himself familiar with all

that can be known of their manners, morals, religion, and political institutions, entering their schools to listen to the teaching of their philosophers, and mingling on their festival days with the crowd celebrating their rites of worship, he will perceive how much the imagination has disguised their moral depravity, their ignorance, and their miseries; and will return to offer up thanks to God, that he was born among Christians.

The proper office of religious belief is the formation of character. Our faith teaches us, that we shall be happy or miserable in a future life, as we have done good, or done evil, in the present. But what is good? What is virtue? These are inquiries which the theologian has to answer. It may be said, that, as far as regards practice, they are easily settled. When the question is merely, whether some particular action be lawful or not, it is easily settled, in a majority of cases of common occurrence, by one who will not let the inferior part of his nature triumph over his judgment. But different nations, different sects of Christians, and different individuals have held opposite opinions upon many subjects of morals of the greatest practical importance. You think religious persecution a profanation of the name of Christianity,

and an outrage upon the first principles of natural justice. But a little more than a century ago, it was regarded as one of the first duties of a Christian community, and there were very few Christian communities which did not act in conformity to this error. Most Christians now have, or profess to have, a decided opinion and strong feeling against it; but, if any one be in the habit of ascribing a high value to the authority of the Church, it may startle him to recollect, that he has the authority of Christendom against him from the fifth century to the end of the seventeenth.

There have been other gross and disastrous mistakes concerning morals in the Christian world. Very erroneous, and consequently very mischievous, opinions have prevailed concerning the fundamental questions, What constitutes the Christian character? and How must it be formed? These mistakes imply a radical misconception of what constitutes moral excellence; for it is in the attainment of moral excellence that the Christian character consists. They have shown themselves in all those imaginary substitutes for personal goodness, the efficacy of which has been so eagerly believed. The superstitions of Heathenism in India have hardly produced devotees more wanting in the

qualities that entitle men to respect or love, or with more characteristics that excite disgust or pity, than some of those who have been venerated as models of Christian excellence in different ages and among different sects of the Christian world.

Christianity has been represented as lending the authority of its sanctions to errors the most alien from it, by requiring men to submit their consciences and their reason to ecclesiastical rule, to the decisions of a church. It has been represented as in alliance with arbitrary power, and as enjoining as a duty passive obedience to all rulers, especially hereditary rulers, whatever may be their character and acts. The latter doctrine was insisted upon but a century ago by men of more than common ability. The former doctrine survives in its original vigor. There are at the present day other questions agitated, of great practical importance. Some Christians, entitled to much respect for their virtues, deny the right of defensive war. There are, to give a very different example, Christians who allow a license that appears to others in a high degree criminal, maintaining the lawfulness of professing to believe articles of faith which they do not believe. It may seem strange to mention this as an unsettled point

of morality; but there is no doubt that the matter is still controverted in the minds of many individuals, who commonly arrive at what we should consider a wrong decision.

But the questions as to what we ought not to do are of much easier solution than those which relate to what we ought to do. The nature and extent of the duties of active benevolence, of those duties which require something to be done, in contradistinction from those which require something to be avoided, are very imperfectly understood. Different men have different notions of right and wrong, and estimate very differently the requisitions of duty; and they pursue in consequence very different modes of life. Perhaps the selfishness that appears in not acting leaves as much misery to exist in the world as aggressive selfishness creates.

As to the principles of morals, there is no greater agreement than with regard to the practice. There are moralists, who contend that some one particular motive, which they select from all others, is in every case necessary to constitute an action virtuous. There are others, who allow that there are many motives which all partake of the nature of virtue. Those, too, who admit but one differ most

widely from each other as to the character of this one; some, for instance, resolving all virtue into refined selfishness, and others into perfect benevolence; — some contending that all things are to be done for the glory of God, in some literal sense of those terms, not in the popular sense in which they are used by the Apostle; and others, that we are to be guided solely by that intuitive perception of right and wrong which they ascribe to conscience, considered as a distinct faculty of the mind. With different opinions respecting morals, men may practise in a considerable degree alike; but it would be idle to contend, that their opinions have no influence on their practice, and none on their character and happiness. From the inseparable connection between theology and morals, it is the business of the theologian to study the principles of the latter science, and to trace out their proper bearing on the conduct of men. Morality is not to be determined by our first impressions; nor is it a matter of intuitive judgment. We cannot be sure that all which we have been taught concerning it is true. It is not, as has been said, a science which admits of no discoveries. Morality is now better understood than in former times, and it will, we may believe, be better understood by our posterity than it is by us.

The ultimate objects of a theologian should be to improve his own character, and the moral condition of his fellow-men. But, in order to effect the latter purpose, it is necessary to understand the human character. The complicated machinery of the mind is easily deranged; and no small mischief has been often produced by the ill-directed attempts of the ignorant and violent to regulate and put it in motion. You have undertaken to be a guide to the erring, and an instructer of the ignorant. You have undertaken to lead men in the path of virtue and holiness. Take care that you do not repel them from it, or lead them astray. It is not so simple a work as one may imagine. A sentence may undo the effect of a sermon. It is the office of a theologian to administer the medicine of the mind; and, in order to do this, he should be acquainted with its general constitution, and the diseases to which it is liable.

And how is this necessary knowledge of human nature to be acquired? In the first place, by distinctly perceiving the truth, that it is a kind of knowledge which may and ought to be acquired, — that it does not come merely by chance or by intuition. Every one judges of the characters of those around him; but how few judge correctly. In no science is it so ne-

cessary, as in the science of human nature, for the learner to be first convinced of his ignorance. In order to remove this ignorance, we must study our own hearts. We must be in the habit of analyzing those aggregates of motives from which we usually act, and of giving to every individual motive its true name. We must observe how we ourselves are affected by the actions and words of others, how often the effect produced is different from that intended, and we must remark why it is so. We must study human life as it lies around us, presenting phenomena not less various, nor less difficult of explanation, than those of the material world. We must remark the influence of those circumstances, that operate so powerfully to mould the character in its formation, and to produce those subsequent changes which often render it, in advanced life, not less different from what it was in youth, than the countenance itself; so that, like that, it retains only something of the outline of its former features. We must acquaint ourselves with the principle of association, that great law of the mind, which it is so important to regulate; which, when not properly regulated, operates with blind agency, binding together thoughts and sentiments and feelings in mischievous connection.

We must observe how often this law is directed to the production of evil, by the want of consideration, or judgment, or temper, in those who undertake the business of moral instruction. We must study the volume of human history with its numberless pages, and learn the nature of man from his past actions and works. We must be acquainted with those productions in which the human character is justly exhibited by the great masters of the art, and in which poetry and eloquence give a vivid expression of human feelings and sentiments. We must study the writings, in which a mild philosophy has shed a steady illumination upon the mind and heart of man; and those also, in which, as in the histories of Tacitus, flashes are, every now and then, breaking forth, which send light into the recesses where the viler passions hide themselves. The knowledge of human nature is a science; and if in this, as in other branches of knowledge, some have a natural aptitude for its acquisition more than others, yet our acquirements will depend much upon our exertions. It is a science, too, which has shared with every other in the progress of improvement. Our acquaintance with the principles and motives which influence the mind and heart of man is more extensive and correct

than the knowledge of those who have preceded us.

It remains to consider what preparatory studies are required for the attainment of theological knowledge. A theologian must be familiar with the ancient languages. But this is not all. As respects the modern languages, we must not confine ourselves to the sources of information which may be found in our own. There are many works of much value to a theologian in the French and German. In Germany, for the last forty or fifty years, the science of theology has been more cultivated than in any other country; though certainly not altogether with the happiest results. Nobody, I trust, will imagine, that I admire the licentious, and, as it seems to me, most extravagant and untenable speculations of some of the modern German theologians. In reading their works, I find what I cannot but regard as theories and arguments of impalpable inanity; I seem, like Æneas when entering the confines of the dead, to be passing through a region of monstrous shadows, and to be, like him, pursuing a journey,

> "Quale per incertam lunam, sub luce malignâ,
> Est iter in sylvis."

Some of these theologians, who have attained

a certain degree of celebrity out of their own country, are, I think, not entitled to any kind of respect. To others of them one may be disposed to apply the character which Thirlby, in the celebrated dedication of his edition of Justin Martyr, gives of Isaac Vossius: — "He had great learning, superior genius, and judgment too, which, if not very great, was enough and more than enough for one, who, unless I am entirely deceived, cared but little about discovering the truth upon any subject. He made it his object to seek for and invent new, out-of-the-way, and wonderful opinions in criticism, in philosophy, and in theology. Whether they were true or not, he left to be examined by those who might think themselves interested in the matter." * But this character is far from being applicable to the whole body of modern German theologians. There are many who are not entitled to the praise, and some who are not obnoxious to the censure. Some have exe-

* "Erant in eo homine multæ literæ, ingenium excellens, judicium etiam, si non maximum, at tantum quantum ei satis superque fuit, qui, nisi omnia me fallunt, quid in quâvis re verum esset, leviter curavit perspicere. Satis habuit nova, devia, mirabilia, in criticâ, in philosophiâ, in theologiâ, quærere et excogitare: vera anne falsa essent, id vero aliis exquirendum reliquit, qui sua istuc interesse existimarent."

cuted laborious works of great value; and others have written with sobriety and good sense, as well as learning and ingenuity. As respects the mass of those works with which we can become acquainted only through the German language, their value, without doubt, has been considerably overrated; nor would it be safe to recommend the indiscriminate study of them to one apt to estimate the truth of opinions by their novelty. But still the value of many of these works is such, as to render a knowledge of the language very desirable to the theological student, and necessary to a consummate theologian.

In enumerating the intellectual qualifications necessary, I have perhaps convinced you, that it is impossible to be a theologian. In the highest and most comprehensive sense of the word it may be so. But perhaps I shall have done some service, if I have convinced you, that it is no easy thing to acquire those qualifications, which a theologian, in the more popular sense of the word, may be fairly expected to possess. More, a great deal more, is necessary than a familiar acquaintance with some system of technical divinity, and with the arguments by which this is usually defended. Much more is required than that knowledge which a man

may collect from reading a few books in our own language, and those perhaps the books of a particular sect. Much more than a familiarity with those metaphysical quibbles, which show how much morbid ingenuity may remain, while common sense is entirely prostrated; and which, at the same time, like words of magic, darken the whole creation of God to those by whom they are pronounced. Much more than to be able to quote a mass of texts indiscriminately from different books of the Bible, and to interpret them conformably to the use of words in that theological dialect which we may have learnt in childhood. And much more is required than a facility in running through all those errors which our church, or our party, may have faithfully preserved, since the time when the science, of which I speak, lay in a state of the lowest debasement. True theology has little to do with any of these acquirements. It is a science of vast extent and dignity, embracing all the knowledge which directly or remotely concerns man as an immortal being. We believe, indeed, that its most important truths, and the main arguments by which these are defended, may be made intelligible to all; that in its last results it coincides with the first judgments of unprejudiced reason; and that the

man of plain good-sense, who exercises his understanding and thinks for himself, and the profound and intelligent scholar, will find that there are no essential points of difference in their fundamental opinions. We may all arrive at last upon common ground, where the highest and humblest may meet together.

But if any one refuse to submit to the decisions of our natural reason, and the dictates of our natural feelings; if he come to us, teaching what he calls incomprehensible propositions, and truths above reason; if he maintain doctrines abhorrent to all our best sentiments respecting God and his moral government; and if he require us to believe the system which he has received; we have a right to ask in return, What are his qualifications to discuss these subjects? How extensively has he examined, how profoundly has he thought upon their nature and relations? How thoroughly has he acquired all that preparatory knowledge which is necessary in their investigation? What is the compass of his studies, and what the reach of his faculties, that he thinks his judgments of so much value, and his censures of so much authority? Has he in fact gone through that long course of discipline, necessary to enable him to decide questions of science and criticism,

as they arise in the study of theology? We shall find, in many cases, that our new teacher is just as well qualified for the work which he has undertaken, as one with, or without, a little elementary knowledge of mathematics would be qualified to decide on the truth of the demonstrations of Newton or La Place. Is theology, the most profound and comprehensive of sciences, the only one in which ignorant presumption may be allowed to dogmatize? It has done this, and it has done much more. It has oppressed and persecuted. Hence it is, that the progress of truth has been so slow and embarrassed. The operation of vulgar prejudices and passions has restrained the intellect of the wisest, and checked the courage of the boldest; and the science has in consequence not yet attained that rank and estimation which belong to it. It has been degraded by the irruptions of ignorance and barbarism; its provinces have been seized upon, and the rightful possessors of the soil driven away.

Something, then, has been effected, if any just views have been given you of the importance and dignity of this science. It is, in truth, the highest philosophy, including every thing most interesting in speculation and practice. In proportion as it is better understood and taught,

the minds of men will be more enlightened, and their moral principles and feelings elevated and improved. And there is hope that it will be better understood and taught. The obstacles which have opposed its progress are continually giving way. The human understanding will not much longer submit to such reasoning on the subjects of theology, as on every other subject it has learned to treat with contempt. The prejudice, before which the world bowed but yesterday, will to-morrow find "none so poor to do it reverence." Let us consider how much the cause of true religion, and virtue, and happiness, for they are all inseparably connected, has been advanced during the last two centuries. Let us consider how much may be gained in the ages to come, if we are but faithful to our posterity, and they are but faithful to themselves. It is only two centuries since Grotius lived; since the time when he was struggling against ignorance, and persecution, and "oppositions of science falsely so called," to guide his contemporaries in the way to truth. His contemporaries, in return, attempted to confine and extinguish, within the walls of a prison, that light which was to spread itself through the world. They drove him from his native land; and, when the shades of death were about to close

upon him, he might have looked round and seen not a single country free from the oppression of ecclesiastical tyranny; and only one in which any religion unmixed with the grossest error enjoyed even a doubtful toleration; only one where a few harassed individuals had found a temporary refuge, from which they were just about to be driven.* What deep and holy joy would have filled the mind of that great man, if a prophetic vision could have been accorded to him of what we now behold around us; if, amid his labors, disappointments, and sufferings, he could have been assured that he had not labored and suffered in vain; if he could have foreseen that in this country, — which was then just appearing within the political horizon, but which even then had attracted his attention, and been one object of his extensive studies, — a vast empire was to be established, throughout which the principles of religious liberty should be fully recognized, and in which so large a portion of the community should comprehend the essential character, and feel the true influence, of our religion. But there is a promise of fairer and happier days to the whole civilized world. The light of Christianity has been ob-

* I refer to the expulsion of the Unitarians from Poland in 1661.

scured, and men have been travelling in darkness. But the thick vapors which concealed earth and heaven are breaking away; and we begin to perceive the beautiful prospect which lies before us, and the glittering of spires and pinnacles in the distance.

In enumerating the intellectual acquisitions necessary to constitute a consummate theologian, one may naturally feel some apprehension like that which Cicero expresses, when about to speak of those requisite in an orator: "Vereor ne tardem studia multorum, qui desperatione debilitati, experiri nolint, quod se assequi posse diffidant." I may, however, say as he does: "Sed par est omnes omnia experiri, qui res magnas, et magno opere expetendas, concupiverunt. Quod si quem aut natura sua, aut illa præstantis ingenii vis, forte deficiet, aut minus instructus erit magnarum artium disciplinis; teneat tamen eum cursum, quem poterit. Prima enim sequentem, honestum est in secundis tertiisque consistere." All the knowledge which the theological student acquires will be valuable. Whatever faculties he cultivates may be turned to account. It would be a poor reason to neglect to do any thing, because there is so much which may be done to advantage.

It is to our clergy that we must look for a

body of learned theologians. It is through them principally, that the benefits of this science are to be derived to the community. But, in order that they may become qualified for their office, the means of education must be afforded them; and leisure must be afforded them to pursue their studies, when the work of education is finished. The standard of preaching is very high with us; and it certainly is not desirable that it should be lowered. But, this being the case, the mere weekly round of a clergyman's labors has been found in some situations too severe, and even destructive of health and life. We have witnessed the spectacle of men of the finest genius perishing under the slow torture of unremitted mental exertion. Something has been done to prevent the recurrence of this calamity; and means might be easily devised, — but this is not the place to point them out, — to lessen the pressure of duties which is still too great. It is with theology, as with every other department of knowledge and literature; if we would have them flourish among us, we must show that we estimate their value, and the worth of those services which are devoted to their cultivation. We must not be "slowly wise," nor "meanly just." In conferring public rewards, there is

nothing more opposite to true wisdom, than a calculating spirit of parsimony. Our literary men have been pursuing their labors under peculiar disadvantages; and we must be ready to afford every facility and every encouragement to their exertions; to extend a steady patronage to our literary institutions, to increase our public libraries, and to enlarge all our means of knowledge. We must be generous, and considerate, and kind; ready to praise and approve where praise and approbation are merited; liberal in our rewards, and reasonable in our demands.

If we would not have our country, with all its immeasurable resources, become a sort of barbaric empire; if we would not have a half-civilized population spread over our soil, ignorant of all that adorns, and ennobles, and purifies the character of man; if we would not be overrun with every form of fanaticism and folly; if we desire that our intellectual and moral rank should keep pace with our unceasing enlargement as a nation; if we desire that just notions of religion, and correct principles of duty, should manifest their influence, and convey their blessings through the community; if we love our native land, and rejoice in its honor, and should be humbled in its degradation; we must recollect that good and evil are

before us, and that it is for us to choose which we will; but that the one is not to be secured, nor the other avoided, by accident. What we may become will depend upon ourselves; not upon what we may wish, but upon what we may do. The character of its intellectual men gives its character to a nation. That literature which is without morals and without Christian faith, like the literature of France during the age of Voltaire, is one of the worst evils to which God ever abandons a people. That literature which throughout regards men as his creatures, and as immortal beings, is one of the greatest blessings which he ever confers. As for those who are engaged in the studies of which I have been speaking, they have motives enough, in whatever situation they may be, to call forth all their efforts. But in our country, where so much is at stake; where the last experiment seems to be making, to determine what man may become when placed in the most favorable circumstances; where every thing is in a forming state, and so much depends upon the impressions now received, and the direction now given, the motives of which I speak acquire an overwhelming force. What must be the responsibility of those who are engaged in studies, which have so direct an influ-

ence upon the character and condition of men! And what consciousness of desert can be more honorable or more animating than his, who feels that he is directing all his efforts, that he is devoting the whole energy of his mind, that he is pouring himself out like water to swell the tide which is to bear his country on to happiness and glory!

THOUGHTS

ON

TRUE AND FALSE RELIGION.

The following tract was first published in the "Christian Disciple" for September and October, 1820.

THOUGHTS

ON

TRUE AND FALSE RELIGION.

Considered merely in relation to this world, there is no subject on which it is more important for us to hold correct opinions, than on the subject of religion. There are no questions of such interest to us, as those which it proposes to answer. There is no department of knowledge, in which ignorance and error so essentially affect the character and condition of individuals and of society. Determine the relative degrees of virtue and happiness in different communities, and you will have determined the relative degrees in which the influence of correct religious principle is felt; and, on the other hand, false notions of religion, ignorance, and superstition will be found in nearly the same proportions as vice and misery.

There is abundant proof of the fact just stated. We find evidence of it in the condition of

the most polished heathen nations, the Greeks and Romans. There is indeed a deceptive glare cast around them by the splendors of art and genius. We are liable to be deluded, likewise, by a vulgar, school-boy admiration of virtues, which never existed but in fancy; and of which scarce any other show of evidence is to be found, but some high-sounding epithets, used by such writers as Livy in compliment to their countrymen, and interpreted at the present day in conformity to our own notions of moral excellence, and not those of a heathen. But, putting aside these causes of error, if we examine into the real condition of those ancient nations, we shall find melancholy and decisive evidence of the truth maintained. It will gather round us from every side. Their religion, erroneous and corrupting as it was, will be found a true index of the virtue and happiness which existed; and the want of some higher principle of moral conduct, than it was capable of furnishing, will appear in the examples of profligacy, injustice, and cruelty, which will rise in dark masses to our view; in the general want of personal security and peace; in the absence of domestic comfort and those charities which make life dear to us; and in the loosely compacted machinery and irregular movements of every organized society.

We may look to the dark ages; and compare the state of religion, though that religion was called Christianity, with the state of morals, safety, and happiness. We may look for further evidence of the truth maintained to Spain and Italy, or to Turkey and Hindostan. We may consider the tremendous lesson which France has been giving to mankind. We may look where we will, and we shall everywhere perceive the same general correspondence between the notions, true or false, which prevail concerning religion, and the condition, good or bad, of those by whom they are held.

But we need not recur to the observation of what has been, in order to prove that the direct influence of religion, properly understood, is in the highest degree beneficial. We have only to consider what must be the operation of the truths which it makes known. For the happiness and consolation of man, it teaches him that he is the creature and care of infinite goodness. To support and animate him in all virtue, it is continually inculcating the truth, that God has made him the arbiter of his own happiness or misery; and that virtue and happiness are the same. It makes him know and feel, that the more good he communicates, the more he enjoys; and that benevolence, generosity, and

self-devotion are his interest. It places distinctly before him the fact, that there are pleasures of two kinds; some, which of themselves, by their mere excess and repetition, exhaust the power of enjoyment, and make the soul "embody and embrute," leaving it at last without any sensibility but to pain; and others, which invigorate the faculties, which enlarge our capacities for happiness, whose enjoyment is but a step to higher enjoyment; and this to continue for ever. The influence of such religion on the intellectual is not less than upon the moral part of man. By preserving the mind pure from vice, it preserves its faculties in free and healthy exercise. The truths which it teaches have a bearing on almost every other interesting speculation. The moral taste which it cultivates is intimately connected with the taste for every other sort of beauty; and the enlargement and elevation produced by the habitual contemplation of the infinite, the invisible, and the remote, will manifest themselves in all the operations and purposes of the mind.

Nor are we to estimate the power of religion in a community merely by its direct influence. It affects those who think least of its value. It affects them through public sentiment, by raising the standard of morals, by rendering a cer-

tain decorum of manners necessary to any degree of estimation, by the direct action of sympathy with those around them, and by the continual operation of institutions, and modes of thinking and acting, in which the truths of religion are recognized.

But we must not expect a beneficial influence from every thing which is called religion. We must attend to something more than the name; for poison as well as food has been called by this name. Religion, considered in the abstract, is a system of truths, and operates on the mind through faith in these truths. But because these truths are of a nature to yield the most blessed fruits, it does not follow, that a system of opinions inconsistent with, or contradictory to them, will produce the same effects, because men have given the same name to both. If religion be of the highest value, because it affords us as clear notions of the Divinity as we are capable of receiving, it does not follow that a system is of any value, which confounds our notions of God by unintelligible doctrines respecting his nature. If religion be adapted to produce the most excellent virtues, by holding forth the most powerful motives and sanctions, and requiring that these should be regarded in every moral action, we cannot

therefore infer, that the same effect is to be expected from a religion which traffics in pardons for sin; or from a religion which teaches men that the main thing is to perform certain rites and to regard certain observances; or from a religion which insists on the reception of a system of doctrines as the sure and only passport to eternal happiness; and still less from one which brings virtue into contrast with some other requisition or characteristic, and makes light of the former, and regards it even as a subject of contempt and jealousy, in comparison with the latter, — denominating all human excellence by some such title as *the filthy rags of self-righteousness.* If it be the genuine operation of true religion to produce a constant effort after moral perfection, because it teaches that good and evil are before us, and that it is for us to choose and attain which we will; we cannot conclude that this will be the operation of a religion, which inculcates, as a fundamental truth, the doctrine, that we have no moral power, that our condition will not at all depend on any thing which we may do; but that our eternal happiness or misery has been determined by the pleasure of another being, who has issued his irreversible decrees without reference to any

qualities which he may see in us. True religion is an inestimable blessing; because it teaches that God is the everlasting Friend and Father of his creatures, a God of infinite goodness. But what shall we say of a religion which teaches that he has formed men so, that they are by nature wholly inclined to all moral evil; that he has determined in consequence to inflict upon the greater part of our race the most terrible punishments; and that, unless he has seen fit to place us among the small number of those whom he has chosen out of the common ruin, he will be our eternal enemy and infinite tormentor; that, having hated us from our birth, he will continue to exercise upon us for ever his unrelenting and omnipotent hatred! Whatever may be the worth of true religion, it surely does not follow, that this system of blasphemy must be also of great value, and very beneficial in its effects. Yet he must be a very ignorant, or a very bold man, who will affirm, that the doctrines last stated have not been taught, and very extensively too, as fundamental doctrines of Christianity.

With us Christians, religion is identified with Christianity. We receive the truths which it teaches, not because we are able to establish them by the deductions of our reason, but be-

cause we believe them to have been taught by God; because we think that the uncertain deductions of reason have been confirmed by the highest possible authority. But what is Christianity? A very different thing, unquestionably, from what has been the professed religion of far the greater part of Christians. The proposition may appear startling at first sight; but consider the state of Christendom from the fourth century to the sixteenth, and ask yourself, how great was the resemblance between the system of doctrines which prevailed during this period, and the system of truths which was taught by Jesus Christ? When you are satisfied with regard to the faith of the Catholic Church, you may then examine the scheme of doctrines developed in the Institutes of Calvin; or the same scheme, as it appears digested in the works of the Westminster Assembly. If any one, wholly unacquainted with our religion, were told, that this was Christianity; and that the system taught in these books was to be found in another collection of books, called the New Testament, I believe his surprise would be uncontrollable and unimaginable, when he came to read the New Testament itself, and to understand what is actually taught there.

If what we regard as Christianity, then, be true and valuable, what are we to think of such systems as those just mentioned? Why do we value Christianity? Because it gives us assurance of certain truths, which we believe to be of infinite importance. These truths constitute our religion. The character which we attach to them is not to be transferred to any thing different, and still less to any thing contradictory. So far as religion is concerned, these truths, and these alone, have operated to improve the condition of men. Whatever is opposed to them, whether it be taught under the name of Christianity or not, is opposed to Christianity. Just in proportion as we regard the latter as valuable, shall we regard the former as pernicious. Just in proportion as we are desirous of promoting the influence of true religion, shall we be desirous of removing all those false doctrines by which its influence is counteracted and destroyed; and counteracted and destroyed the more effectually, because they have assumed its name and authority.

There cannot be different systems of equal value. There are not two opposite kinds of truth in religion. Nothing can be more irrational than a strong attachment to any particular mode of faith, or form of worship, accom-

panied with indifference about its correctness, and indisposition to inquire into its real character. Nothing can be more loose or inconsistent than his opinions, who thinks religion a great good, but does not think it worth the while to ascertain what particular doctrines religion teaches. If certain truths are of infinite importance, the errors opposed to them are in the highest degree pernicious; and he who maintains the latter, as if they were of the same nature with the former, is committing a very serious mistake indeed.

It is true, that the worst errors respecting Christianity do not always produce their natural effects. Perhaps they never have produced their full and complete effects. The essential truths of our religion appear so distinctly and so prominently in the revelation which God has given us, they are so conformable to our reason, and so agreeable to our natural sentiments, that they have never been wholly obscured and forgotten among Christians. Their operation, therefore, has been counteracted, but not entirely destroyed. Opposite truths and errors have existed in the same mind, and mutually controlled each other's influence. In many minds, these errors have existed merely in the form of speculation; and have been met and

overborne, whenever they tended to any practical result, by natural good sense, correct moral principles, and sincere piety. The practical religion of men is often a very different thing from their professed religion; or from that contained in the creeds of the sect to which they consider themselves as belonging. Nor may we ever expect to see the whole operation and perfect results of any false opinions, when those by whom they are maintained live intermixed with others, holding opposite doctrines, whose numbers and character are such as to command respect. It is the tendency of the opposite opinions of various men to act upon and modify each other. A man without any religion will be a very different person, if he live in the midst of a religious community, from what he would have been in a society of men equally destitute of religious principle with himself; and the case is similar with him whose religion is erroneous. The characters of men are, without doubt, affected by many other causes beside the errors of the religious creed which they may profess.

We believe, and we rejoice to believe, that there have been men of excellent virtue in every different faith. But in estimating the virtue, or rather the merit, of individuals, we are con-

tinually making allowance for their difference of faith; for the different degrees in which they have attained a knowledge of true religion, and of the character of its requirements. We do not expect certain virtues from men under the influence of certain errors. In giving the tribute of our admiration to the moral excellence of Socrates or of Cicero, we have to remember that Socrates and Cicero were heathens. In going back a century or two, if we would look without horror upon some who have passed even for saints, we must recollect, that they believed religious persecution to be a duty. We are continually applying the same principle, often perhaps unconsciously, in judging of the characters of those whom we regard as holding great errors; and frequently where such errors are entertained, though we may find much to praise, we find also, if not much to censure, at least much to regret.

There have been excellent men, whose belief on the most important subjects has been very erroneous. But if any one should infer from this fact, that all different faiths are equally adapted to produce such men, and that there is no ground, therefore, in their practical effects, for preferring one to another, he would reason in the same manner, as if, having observed that

some men retain their health and live long in insalubrious situations and unhealthy employments, he should conclude that any one climate or mode of life is as favorable to health as another. The constitution of man, and the testimony of experience, would be overlooked in the latter inference no more than in the former. When it can be shown that men's opinions do not influence their conduct; that there is an entire divorce between their intellect and their principles of action; that men do not perform certain things, because they believe it to be their interest or duty to perform them; and that religion, which has been regarded as so active a principle in the production of both good and evil, is really nothing more than an inert subject of speculation; then it may be inferred, not indeed that it is wholly unimportant whether our religion be true or false, but that it is of little more importance than whether we believe the system of Newton or of Ptolemy respecting the material universe.

To false religion we are indebted for persecutors, zealots, and bigots; and perhaps human depravity has assumed no form more odious than that in which it has appeared in such men. Persecution is passing away, we may trust, for ever; and torture will no more

be inflicted, and murder no more committed, under pretence of extending the spirit and influence of Christianity. But the temper which produced it still remains; its parent bigotry is still in existence; and what is there more adapted to excite disgust, than the disposition, the feelings, the motives, the kind of intellect and degree of knowledge, discovered by some of those, who pretend to be the sole defenders and patrons of religious truth in this unhappy world, and the true and exclusive heirs of all the mercy of God? It is a particular misfortune, that, where gross errors in religion prevail, the vices of which I speak show themselves especially in the clergy; and that we find them ignorant, narrow-minded, presumptuous, and, as far as they have it in their power, oppressive and injurious. The disgust which this character, in those who appear as ministers of religion, naturally produces, is often transferred to Christianity itself. It ought to be associated only with that form of religion by which those vices are occasioned. But such mistakes are continually made, because men do not discriminate between the different systems of faith which have passed under the name of Christianity, nor recognize the very different effects which they are adapted to produce.

It is indeed questionable, whether the direct influence of the errors which have been connected with Christianity upon those by whom they are held, is equally mischievous with their indirect consequences. They are, it cannot be doubted, among the most operative causes of unbelief; and of what probably is much more common, and what we have so much reason to lament, indifference and scepticism in respect to religion. A system of doctrines is presented to men, at which their minds revolt; and they are told that this is Christianity. A *gospel* is proposed to them, whose first aspect belies its name. If they are prevented from rejecting our religion altogether, by perceiving something of that character of divinity which belongs to it, and cannot be wholly obscured; by the authority of so many excellent men who have regarded it as the foundation of their hopes; and by some knowledge of the evidences of its truth; yet such misrepresentations will not be without their effect. Men will in consequence of them regard religion as a subject of habitual doubt and perplexity, an irksome topic of contemplation, one from which their minds will be always ready to escape. It will thus be prevented from mingling with their thoughts; it will not direct their common purposes; it will

not influence their affections; it will not establish its authority in their hearts. Such, indeed, will often be the case, even when, for want of knowing any thing better, they have at last brought themselves to assent to that creed in which alone religion has been distinctly presented to their minds.

The extravagant errors which have been forced into an unnatural union with Christianity may be traced back to ages, from which we consent to receive no other opinions. They derived their origin from men, whose speculations on every other subject would command at the present day but little deference. He would be regarded only with wonder or ridicule, who should think it worth while to quote Athanasius, or Augustine, or Calvin, or Turretin, as an authority upon any topic except the peculiar theological doctrines which they maintained. The mysteries of the later Platonists, with the exception of the mystery of the Trinity, are at the present day treated with not much respect; and, though the schoolmen have been our masters in matters of religion, we think it little worth while to study their writings, and forget to whom we have been indebted. Thus it is, that religious doctrines, which had their birth in ages of ignorance, of false

principles, and false reasoning, still remain in full vigor; though all the rest of the brotherhood of errors, of which they made a part, have long since perished. They remain, disconnected from all the modes of conception and habits of mind, among which they had their origin. They remain, standing insulated and unsupported, except by their connection with each other. They are at variance with all the knowledge, and all the opinions and sentiments, of our age upon every related subject.

If we should take up any one of the standard authors upon these subjects, any one of those, whose reputation is highest, as a writer on natural religion, on morals, on the science of the human mind, or as skilful in the development of the human character, and, in the midst of our reading, should chance to recollect some of the doctrines of technical theology, we should at once perceive how strangely they come athwart the whole current of our thoughts, and how irreconcilable they are with all that is best established in human knowledge. We are transferred from the region of all certain or probable truth, from all those topics of contemplation among which the mind loves to dwell, into quite a new field of speculation, very barren and hideous; lying, if I may so speak, out

of the limits of the habitable world. Let any one, while reading the fine arguments and beautiful illustrations of Paley respecting the goodness of God, bring to mind that doctrine which teaches that this is a ruined world, that far the greater portion of men are doomed from their birth to inevitable woe, that there is "a curse of God upon the creatures for our sake"; and that, with the exception of a privileged few, who do not contribute much to brighten the prospect, we see nothing about us but sin and its punishments; — in the shock, which this horrible doctrine will give to all the affections and feelings that fill his mind, he may perceive one proof, among many, of the direct contrariety, of which I speak, between what reason and revelation teach, and what has been taught by false theology; between the traditionary doctrines of the latter, and the best conclusions of enlightened philosophy.

But we find that there are many claiming to be exclusively Christians, who insist that doctrines, such as those to which I have alluded, constitute the essential truths and characteristic features of our religion; and who raise a passionate outcry against all who endeavour to vindicate Christianity from this imputation. The creeds of every established church in

Christendom teach such doctrines. The whole body of the clergy in every such church may be divided into three classes, — those who heartily believe the doctrines of their creed; the smallest number, I suspect, by far; — those who, by repeated efforts, and by carefully limiting their inquiries, have succeeded in silencing their own doubts, and in persuading themselves that these doctrines admit of a plausible defence; — and, in the last place, a very considerable number indeed, and perhaps the most injurious to the interests of religion, those who give their solemn assent to the truth of doctrines which they do not believe. And what is the consequence of all this?

Let us suppose an acute and intelligent man, occupied either in the affairs of the world, in professional studies, or literary pursuits, and whose habits of life have in consequence been such as to leave him little leisure to make himself acquainted with the science of theology. Let us suppose, that, from the circumstances of his situation, some one of those systems of error, which have assumed the name of Christianity, should have been continually presented to him as Christianity itself. How is he to determine that this pretension is not founded in truth? How is he to know, that what is pub-

licly announced as the religion of Christ, and what those around him, who profess to be best acquainted with the subject, affirm to be the religion of Christ, does not in fact deserve the name? By such a man, the popular system would for the most part hardly be thought to deserve serious attention; especially if he should find, that it was in fact disbelieved by a considerable portion of those whose business it is to teach it. If he should happen to take up some one of those books which contain an exposition and defence of any of the principal forms of error which our religion has been made to assume, it is easy to imagine with what contempt and weariness, with what wonder and disgust, he would turn over the pages. It is not difficult to conceive how surprisingly trifling and inane many of those statements, which we theologians are accustomed by courtesy to call arguments, would appear to one familiar with common modes of discussion, and with what may be called the practical reasoning of men.

Religion is not respected, because it is not understood; because a low, earth-born rival has assumed the name and place of that principle whose origin is from heaven. Can we think it wonderful, that there should be many in every

Christian country, who come to feel little respect for a subject which has never been fairly presented to their minds, which has always been connected with associations that are offensive or degrading, and about which those have often written and talked the most, who have said nothing but what tended to misrepresent it and expose it to contempt? We see everywhere the manifest effects of the state of things to which I have adverted. It is not necessary to consider the condition of Catholic countries, where the monstrous corruptions which have been connected with Christianity have left it scarcely any disciples, except among the lower and more ignorant classes of society. We may see enough of the disastrous consequences of error in Protestant countries, in our own neighborhood, among those whom we meet in the common intercourse of life. By the causes which have been mentioned, we may account in a great measure for the phenomenon, that, of the most eminent literary men of Scotland for the last sixty or seventy years, so many have been open enemies, or very doubtful friends, of Christianity. Turn over the pages of the most popular and able literary journal of our times, which has exercised so much influence upon the minds of thousands of readers, and than

which few publications have tended more to mark and distinguish the present age; — you cannot but be struck, I do not say with the infidelity which has occasionally appeared in a few articles, but with a characteristic far more deserving of notice, and suggesting thoughts more serious; — it is the general exclusion of every religious topic, and of nearly all direct reference to Christianity. You would produce scarcely a perceptible change in the character of the work by striking out every thing which implies that such a religion as Christianity exists in the world. Whatever relates to the highest interests and noblest speculations of man is excluded; as if these subjects lay out of the sphere of all true and useful knowledge; nay, as if there would be something of impertinence and folly in introducing topics, borrowed from religion, into writings really intended to influence the sentiments and conduct of the more intelligent classes of society. Whether a man believe the truths of religion or not, he must have an intellect singularly constituted, if he affect to despise them. But the doctrines of false theology have long outlived the time when they could command any respect, except from those whose minds have been disciplined to their reception; and, if we will insist on mis-

taking the latter for the former, it is not strange that such effects should be produced as we see existing.

But the subject presents itself under a still more gloomy aspect. What must be the effect of any of those systems of faith which have assumed the name of orthodoxy, when urged upon the reception of the young? What must be the effect, when such a system, with its hideous features, and squalid with all the barbarism of a rude and ignorant age, is obtruded upon a mind of warm affections, of unperverted and undisciplined feelings, of quick sensibility, and impatient, hasty, and petulant in its judgments? Take such a young man, and persuade him, if you can, to read through the standards of doctrine which your church has sanctioned; no matter whether that church be episcopal or presbyterian, and no matter whether your standard be the Westminster Catechisms and Confession, or the Thirty-nine Articles. Tell him that this is your religion, and must be his. Lay before him your aggregate of unintelligible doctrines concerning God, and of doctrines which are but too intelligible concerning the condition and prospects of man; and tell him that the creed which you put into his hands contains a full exposition of all that is consola-

tory and delightful and lovely and glorious in religion. If you can bring him to contemplate and understand what you have laid before him, have you any doubt with what aversion he will regard your religion?

The different systems of religious error which have prevailed among Christians have usually been employed as very efficacious instruments in effecting the worldly and criminal purposes of those by whom they have been most zealously supported. They have been made to pander to the ambition and vices of unholy men, pretending to be ministers of God and Christ. They have been brought into intimate union with corrupt civil institutions; and, when guarded by the sword of the law, they have liberally repaid the support which they have received, by employing in their turn the terrors and artifices of superstition to humble the minds of men. True religion can be the minister of nothing but good. But false religion may be made an agent in the production of almost any sort of evil. It is of its very essence to misdirect and misemploy the sanctions which it holds forth.

In proof of this, it is not necessary to look back to the period, when a despotism the most odious and degrading was established over Eu-

rope under the name of the Church of Christ; and when the pretended authority of our religion was made a shelter for rank and foul iniquity. It is better to regard the more moderate evils of our own time, and to take examples, which, if not quite so impressive, have a more practical bearing. In every country of Europe, there are without doubt many, who regard religion merely as a part of the political machinery of the state, and a powerful instrument in preserving and strengthening the existing distinctions of society; who, on the one side, view its establishments as a means of exerting power and patronage, and, on the other, as a source from which rank and wealth may be derived. The style and temper in which the national religion is defended often borrow their character from the kind of estimation in which it is held. There is a worldly, political, interested zeal shown in its defence, betraying an origin very different from the spirit of Christianity. It is a zeal for their own profit, and not for the happiness of their fellow-creatures, which engages men in its support. Its corruptions are strenuously defended. All examination and all improvement are angrily repelled. The work of reformation must not be begun; for, if it be suffered to begin, who can tell where

it will stop? Who can tell how many profitable and convenient evils will be removed, or how much that is now tolerated will be marked out for reprobation? In the defenders, therefore, of the established faith, in such writers, for instance, as Horsley, we often find a tone of authority, the insolence of artificial rank, and that gross and impudent unfairness, on which few men will venture, unless they know that there is a strong party ready to cheer them as victors, whatever may be their real success. If its defenders do not write altogether in the style of those controvertists of former days, who knew that the executioner was at hand to give them aid; they nevertheless write like men, who feel that they have the power of the state on their side, and who are far more solicitous to maintain than to justify what is established. In such a state of things, true and useful learning ceases in a great measure to be cultivated by the clergy. Those of them who make their creed a matter of conscience, often find it safest not to examine too curiously the history or the doctrines of the faith which they are required to profess. Their creed presents itself to them on every side as a check to all liberal inquiry in the studies peculiar to their station. Nor is much inquiry found necessary;

for their church, with its established institutions and doctrines, relies for support on a power, which affords it quite another sort of aid than what the learning and talents of its ministers might furnish.

But a deficiency of learning and talents is often far from being the worst characteristic of the clergy of such an establishment. When, as is commonly the case, its offices are considered principally as means of affording patronage, or of securing rank and emolument, men who possess very different qualifications from those necessary for their proper discharge, will be most successful in obtaining them. A large portion of the professed ministers of religion will then be found not merely ignorant and inert, but destitute of religious principles and feelings, without belief in any faith, worthless and profligate. In the character of a great part of the French clergy during the last century, when the highest offices of the church were filled by the nominations of the atheist Regent, Duke of Orleans, and of the brutal debauchee, Louis the Fifteenth, we may perceive an example of what has been said. In the contempt and utter discredit which such clergymen must have cast upon religion, — the great principle that holds human passions in restraint, and

unites man to man, — we may perceive a cause which alone is almost sufficient to account for the awful disruption of society that followed.

But, long before the evils of a corrupt establishment have become so glaring, it is easy to perceive its effects upon the mind of the laity. Their respect for religion, when not merely assumed as a matter of policy, becomes in a great part ceremonial, exterior, and worldly, the respect of those who mistake what is in fact nothing more than mere vulgar pride in the dignity of their church, for something corresponding to religious sentiment and principle. It is a respect for a particular form of faith and worship, produced very much by its associations with antiquity, and solemn buildings, and imposing ceremonies, and high rank, and the power of the state. Nay, where ignorance and superstition gain complete establishment, as in Spain during the last century, all regard for religion may degenerate at last into mere bigotry to a name, accompanied with the mechanical and perfectly unmeaning observance of appointed ceremonies.

Among an ignorant and superstitious people, there may be a certain traditionary and exterior respect, and even zeal, for their religion, while the ministers of that religion are regarded with

dislike and contempt. "With all this attachment to forms and ceremonies," says an enlightened traveller, speaking of the religion of Spain, "it might naturally be expected that the clergy would be looked upon as objects of veneration; but, as far as I can judge, this is by no means the case. The language held towards the ministers of religion is not always respectful, and is sometimes scurrilous." * This singular phenomenon exists, in a greater or less degree, in other parts of Europe. But it cannot exist long where any considerable degree of intellectual improvement prevails. As soon as the mind ceases to be the mere slave of habits and prejudices on which reason has never acted, one of its first rude operations will be to transfer those sentiments, with which it has regarded the ministers of religion, to religion itself, and to associate them with it. Respect for religion can hardly exist, in an enlightened community, separate from respect for its ministers.

When the religion publicly taught is of such a character that reason turns away from it, and refuses to acknowledge its authority, it can have but a weak hold on the minds of the more intelligent, and exercise but little influence on

* Jacob's Travels in the South of Spain, p. 93.

their habitual affections and daily conduct. But there is a spurious sort of religion of the imagination and of temporary sentiment, which sometimes supplies the place of the religion of the understanding. There is such desolation and heartlessness in utter scepticism, that we are ready to turn from it even to a shadowy, unsubstantial image of the truth. The resemblance may indeed be preferred to the reality; for, if it has far less of joy and hope, it is also far less awful and authoritative. Where real, living religion does not exercise its permanent, unremitting influence, we may often find in its stead a poetical, theatrical, mystical religion, which may furnish themes for the expression of fine sentiment, and the indulgence of transient emotion; which delights to talk about sacrifices, but forgets duties, and has nothing to do with the unnoticed patience of obscure suffering, the unpraised self-denials of humble goodness, the strong and silent feelings of habitual piety, or indeed with any virtues, but what are splendid and popular and fit for exhibition. It is such a religion as the authoress of "Delphine" has celebrated with her passionate and enthusiastic eloquence. It is this religion which the writer of the "Philosophical Dictionary," not to mention any work more infamous,

could introduce into his tragedies; and it is for such a religion that Moore and Byron may compose sacred songs. Nobody, I trust, will so far misunderstand me, as to suppose it my intention to deny that the sentiments expressed by such writers are sometimes beautiful and correct. I only mean, that there is a religion, not of the understanding, and not of the heart, which terminates in the expression of fine sentiments.

Such, then, as I have described, and so great, are the evils which result from false notions of religion. They can be removed only by establishing the truth; and, to this end, the truth must be earnestly avowed and defended, with a deep-felt conviction of its value to mankind. It is indeed an unpleasant thing to encounter prejudices, however mischievous, when among those who hold them there are many, very estimable for their virtues, who consider our professions as insincere, and our labors as profane; and who therefore regard us with much harsher feelings of dislike, than common collisions of opinion are apt to produce. But, allowing this to be as great an evil as you will, it must still be weighed against those evils which it is your purpose to remove; and it is but dust in the balance. There is no way in which the truth

can be made to prevail, except by the direct avowal of it; by the forcible and full statement of the arguments by which it is supported; and by a close encounter with opposite errors. Unless the truth be clearly stated and defended, it is not easy to see how it can be made to prevail on any disputed subject; and there is certainly no other way in which you can hope to remove prejudices so widely spread, and so obstinately maintained, as those respecting religion. Yet this encounter of truth with error is religious controversy, of the ill consequences of which we sometimes hear so much, as well from those who are entitled to respect, as from those who are not. But it is a fact, though one not universally recognized, that the manly, well-tempered, steady avowal of the truth tends far more to repress, than to excite, the bitter and angry passions of our opponents. It has its effect upon all honest and fair minds; for the tones of deep earnestness and strong conviction can hardly be mistaken or misrepresented. It has its effect upon minds of a different character; for, where there is no great superiority of vantage-ground, reproach and insult are found in time to be but poor weapons against that sword, with which truth is furnished "from the armory of God."

The real, practical opinions of wise and virtuous men of different sects correspond, without doubt, much more nearly than their creeds. But these creeds determine, in a greater or less degree, the faith of the generality; and it is idle to turn away our eyes, and endeavor to keep out of sight their direct opposition to each other in regard to doctrines the most momentous. Between the extremes of truth and error, we may find also every shade of professed belief, in proportion as men have examined more or less thoroughly, and with more or less honest freedom. But, while these various, wide, and most important differences exist in the professed faith of Christians, the minds of many will be confounded and lost in the search after truth, if those who are able do not step forward to assist and guide their inquiries. It is very desirable that men should give up their old errors; for these errors have been exceedingly pernicious; but there is danger lest he, whose faith has rested principally on authority, and who has learned to doubt and dismiss one doctrine after another, should begin to distrust the whole system of religion. There is danger that he will be unable to distinguish for himself between its essential truths, and those errors of human origin which have been so

blended with it; and that, in rejecting the latter, he will at the same time lose his reverence for the former. In order to prevent this consequence, it is necessary for the defenders of real religion to separate, and to distinguish most clearly, these truths from those errors; to draw a broad and deep line of demarcation between them, and to render evident the essential opposition in their character and effects. It is necessary for them to make it felt, to place it out of dispute, that it is not any childish and petulant love of innovation, nor any contemptible desire of attracting notice by assailing men's prejudices, but that it is their interest in true religion, their conviction of the value of Christianity, and their desire of promoting its influence, which are their motives in opposing doctrines, by which, as they think, its value has been obscured, and its influence obstructed. They must show what they maintain, and why they maintain it; what they oppose, and why they oppose it. They must explain themselves, prudently and wisely as they may, but very earnestly and explicitly.

There is, beyond doubt, great reason to rejoice in what has been already effected toward vindicating the true character of Christianity. But even in those communities where it is best

understood, much, very much, remains to be done, before correct notions of religion can be fully developed, and exhibited in all their relations and bearings, and before our religion can be distinctly recognized, and received by men in all its purity and power. Old errors meet and embarrass us on every side. One false doctrine retreats upon another for support. There are many difficulties to be removed; many inquiries to be answered; and many honest doubts to be solved, which have their origin not in the nature of things, but in long established prejudices. The light is as yet mixed and cloudy. The truth itself, in many minds, rests upon a foundation not perfectly secure, and requiring to be strengthened. There are many ready to believe it, and who do believe it, but whose faith requires to be enlightened and confirmed. There are many whose opinions, though prevailingly correct, are, in a considerable degree, undefined, hesitating, and inconsistent. There are others in a state of painful uncertainty. Under these circumstances, there is a call for instruction and guidance, which those who are able to afford them are not at liberty to decline answering. Our fellow-Christians are in need of such knowledge as may enable them to attain distinct and full conceptions

of religion, and to embrace it with a satisfied mind and earnest faith. If it be in our power to dispense the bread of instruction and life, it will surely be our guilt if we suffer them to complain, that they "look up and are not fed."

But, in communicating this knowledge, we cannot advance a step without encountering one prejudice or another. There is nothing we can teach, which will not be contradicted. There is nothing we can propose, which will not be cavilled at. There is no information we can communicate, which will not be disputed. Every plan, apparently the most unexceptionable, for advancing religious knowledge will meet with opposition; for, as this knowledge advances, some favorite error must fall before it. Let us consider one example. For the last century, there have been reiterated and strong complaints of the imperfection, errors, and obscurity of the common English version of the Bible. There is a series of authorities to this purpose, collected by Archbishop Newcome,* no mean authority himself. They are taken from writers of different communions and belief, some of them of the first eminence

* In his work entitled "An Historical View of the English Biblical Translations: the Expediency of Revising, by Authority, our present Translation: and the Means of Executing such a Revision."

as critics and theologians, and all of them more or less distinguished. To those whom he has quoted, many more of a similar character might easily be added; and it may be doubted whether there is a name of any weight to be placed in the opposite scale. In England, there has been a call from within the Church, and from without, for what Bishop Lowth has spoken of as "that necessary work, a new translation, or a revision of the present translation, of the Holy Scriptures," by public authority. And how much has been effected in consequence? Nothing. The jealousy of all change has stood in the way of all improvement. Those who have felt that they, personally, might hazard something, and could gain nothing, by any alteration, seem to have cared little whether religion might gain any thing or not. Even in our country, where it is unsupported by public authority, the version of King James's translators, erroneous as it is, and in considerable portions of it unintelligible, at least in any correct sense, has attained the same reputation and currency as in England. It is the only version in common use, the only one distributed by our Bible Societies, the only one read in our pulpits; and, till within a few years, no other version of any part of the Scriptures could have been readily

procured in our country. It seems to be forgotten by many, that it is merely a faulty translation; and they appear to regard it with the same reverence as if it were the very original of the holy writings. True zeal for the Scriptures would make us earnest to furnish the best, the very best, means of understanding them correctly and fully. But there is a pretended zeal for the Scriptures, which has shown itself in a quite different manner; and has opposed, directly or indirectly, every effort for the purpose.

This is only one instance, out of many, of the resistance which all attempts to communicate religious knowledge have met with, and will meet with hereafter. Nothing can be effected without a struggle and a contest; and he who has a philosophical or an Epicurean dislike to controversy, who is fearful lest it should injure his temper, or put his dignity to hazard, or endanger his reputation, or disturb his quiet, may assure himself, that he is not such an instrument as is required in the work of enlightening and reforming his fellow-men. The Sybarites might as well have been called in to assist in establishing the fortunes of the Eternal City.

But there is a very different class of men whose aid is not desirable in the attempt to purify our religion. They are men, intemper-

ate, imprudent, distinguished by their levity of judgment, ready to believe that the further they remove from established opinions the more they show themselves free from vulgar prejudices, fond of paradoxes, valuing opinions for their novelty and not for their correctness, taking pleasure in presenting even the truth in a form the most offensive to their opponents, unable to recognize the different appearances which the same essential belief may assume according to the various characters of different minds, understanding little, and valuing less, the judgment and toleration with which the soundest principles are sometimes to be avowed, and having for their principal object to gain a worthless sort of notoriety on the ground of being original thinkers. They commonly agree with the defenders of true religion, if they agree at all, only in attacking certain errors, and not in maintaining the great truths of our faith. But the latter is the main object, ever to be kept in view; and those errors are to be controverted because they are inconsistent with these truths. Such auxiliaries are more to be feared than any opponents. They resemble the predatory bands which accompany the march of an army, exciting ill-will and dread in a friendly country, and of no use in that of an enemy.

There is, it may be believed, a Reformation of religion now taking place, of not less importance than that to which the name has been so long appropriated. The purposes of God, in giving Christianity to men, have not yet been fully unfolded. Without doubt, its truths, notwithstanding the mass of errors with which they have been encumbered, have been continually operating to raise the character, and improve the condition, of man. But, I trust, the providence of God, in conferring this blessing on our race, looked far forward, to ages much beyond our own. There are indications of a period, when the truths, and, in consequence, the evidences, of our religion will be much better understood than at present.

But it is strange, it may be said, that a revelation from God should have been so long mingled with so much human error. You think it strange, then, that he did not, by one vast miracle, annihilate in a moment all those errors respecting religion and duty, which thousands of years had been accumulating in the world; that he did not sweep away at once all prejudices from the minds of men, so that his truth might find unresisted entrance, and hold undisputed sway; and that he did not afterward, by a perpetual act of his power, so

strengthen their understandings, and so restrain their passions and follies, that no false opinions should, in any time to come, be introduced and maintained. Examine the history of opinions, and you will find that errors, either in religion or philosophy, which have once generally prevailed, are very slowly removed and superseded. Common modes of conception, and the popular belief, are transmitted from one generation to another, like the traditionary customs of the East. However unreasonable they may be, it is for the most part only by a very gradual process that they are corrected. The men of one generation are the instructors of the next. Coming ignorant into the world, we are compelled first to receive what others may teach us; to believe, under their direction, before we can exercise our own judgment; and when our instructors have been in error, it takes us a long time to discover the fact, and there are few who are able to discover it at all. The world is very slow and dull in unlearning its prejudices. False doctrines, which sprang up long before the introduction of Christianity, subsequently became connected with it, shooting their branches among its truths, and twining close around them, so as almost to conceal them from view by their rank and poisonous

luxuriance. The same false doctrines still remain flourishing. In opposing the errors of Christians, we are in fact often opposing only the errors of heathen philosophy, a little disguised, and somewhat modified by time and circumstances.

That so much error should have been incorporated with Christianity, or rather, that Christians should have fallen into so many errors on the subject of religion (for that is the true mode of stating the fact), does not seem very difficult to be accounted for, when we consider how much there is in the intellectual, and still more in the moral imperfections of man, which may lead him to embrace readily false conceptions of his highest relations and duties; when we acquaint ourselves with the erroneous doctrines in philosophy, religion, and morals, which prevailed throughout the civilized world at the time of the introduction of our religion; and when we further recollect how very slow and reluctant are the changes which take place in the opinions of large bodies of men, even under the operation of the most powerful causes. That men should retain their errors in opposition to the clearest discoveries of revelation was not more wonderful eighteen centuries ago, than it is at the present day. It is not more

wonderful, than that they should retain them in opposition to the clearest discoveries of reason.

The dark ages were the triumph and consummation of the errors and vices which were in the world when Christianity was introduced. Our religion struggled against them and delayed their progress; and our religion at last delivered men from the slavery in which they were enthralled. It is to the spirit of Christianity that the regeneration of Europe is to be ascribed. There were men, who, if they had but imperfect notions of the real character of God's revelation, yet felt the power of some of its truths; and these were the men who made successful resistance to the evils by which the world was oppressed. Without that elevation and energy of mind which the belief of immortality inspires, without those motives which Christianity alone affords, without that strong feeling of right and wrong which Christian morals alone produce, and without that spirit of self-devotion which is the spirit of our religion, I know not how the deliverance of mankind from the reign of darkness could have been effected. I know not what better hope there would have been for Europe, than there is now for Turkey; or why it might not have

continued to lie in the same state of degradation, moral and intellectual, as that in which almost all Asia has been sunk for at least two thousand years.

Since its commencement, the work of improvement has been continually carried forward; and we now breathe a free air and enjoy a blessed light, such as were never known before. But the work of improvement has been an arduous and severe struggle, a bitter conflict. The errors of men on the most important subjects have been in alliance with their selfishness and their vices; and they have together maintained their ground with determined perseverance. Our religious and moral improvement has been purchased by severe thought and laborious investigation, by high-minded sacrifices of worldly hopes, by a generous contempt of reproach and persecution, by tears and blood. Wise men have spent themselves in painful and thankless labors, and holy men have suffered and died, to procure for us the privileges which we enjoy. In tracing the melancholy history of our race, it is to such characters that we must turn for consolation. They give us pledges, on which we may rely, of the worth of man. They have followed in the track of pure splendor, in which their great

Master ascended to heaven. They have carried on the grand scheme of moral reformation which he began, against similar opposition to what he encountered. They have continued the work of glory and suffering, which he committed to his Apostles. They have purchased ingratitude at the same price which saints and philosophers had paid before. There have been men, who, in the cause of truth and virtue, have made no compromises for their own advantage or safety; who have recognized "the hardest duty as the highest"; who, conscious of the possession of great talents, have relinquished all the praise which they might have so liberally received, if they had not thrown themselves in opposition to the errors and vices of their fellow-men, and have been content to take obloquy and insult instead; who have approached to lay on the altar of God "their last infirmity." They have felt that deep conviction of having acted right, which supported the martyred philosopher of Athens, when he asked, "What disgrace is it to me, if others are unable to judge of me, or to treat me as they ought?"* There is something very solemn and sublime in

*—"ἐμοὶ δὲ τί αἰσχρὸν τὸ ἑτέρους μὴ δύνασθαι περὶ ἐμοῦ τὰ δίκαια μήτε γνῶναι, μήτε ποιῆσαι;"

the feeling produced by considering how differently these men have been estimated by their contemporaries, from the manner in which they are regarded by God. We perceive the appeal which lies from the ignorance, the folly, and the iniquity of man, to the throne of Eternal Justice. A storm of calumny and reviling pursued them through life, and continued, when they could no longer feel it, to beat upon their graves. But it is no matter. They have gone where all who have suffered, and all who have triumphed, in the same noble cause, receive their reward; but where the wreath of the martyr is more glorious than that of the conqueror.*

There is no sufficient support for good morals; there is no security for the common blessings of civilized life; there is no power adequate to raise the condition of man, and to re-

* Such examples Milton delighted to contemplate and follow; and it was the contemplation of such human examples which produced the inspiration of the following passage : —

" Servant of God, well done! well hast thou fought
The better fight, who single hast maintained
Against revolted multitudes the cause
Of truth : . . . . .
And for the testimony of truth hast borne
Universal reproach, far worse to bear
Than violence : for this was all thy care,
To stand approved in sight of God, though worlds
Judged thee perverse."

move the vices and miseries which press so heavily upon human society, except correct religious principle. By comparing our own condition with the condition of those who have preceded us, we may perceive that it has already effected not a little. But more than we can estimate remains to be done; and there is much, which, through the blessing of God, we may hope will hereafter be accomplished. We seem, indeed, to be gathering but the first unripe fruits, and enjoying but a little foretaste of the rich abundance which is promised. There have been times of ignorance and infamous imposture, of violence and triumphant iniquity, when it was no small praise for those who were contending in the cause of human improvement, that they had not despaired of mankind; *quod non desperâssent de rebus humanis.* They, like the Trojan hero, have asked for no omen, but that one best omen, — εἷς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος, — the cause in which they were engaged. But we are living in a different state of things.

There are, without doubt, those, to whom all extended regard for the happiness and improvement of their fellow-men seems an idle and visionary thing. It is lamentable that it should be so; and it is a lamentable mistake, if any one, feeling this indifference, supposes, at the

same time, that he has the spirit of that religion, whose founder "came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." But there is a living spring of virtue and happiness, whose waters have as yet been not a little choked up, and its channels not a little obstructed. There is a purifying and animating principle, whose influences have as yet been very partially felt. It is true, rational, practical religion. Has this no tendency, and no power, to produce those effects, which every good and every wise man must desire so ardently? Even if experience had not long ago answered the question, still there could be no doubt what answer must be given. We are every day witnessing its effects upon the characters of those around us.

Imperfect as the best of men may be, there are in every rank of life those, whom if all were like, the world would present a wonderfully different aspect from what it does at present. How have the characters of such men been formed? How is it that those whom we can most trust, esteem, and love, have become what they are? The general answer is, that their characters have been formed under the influence of religious principle, by the continual action of those great practical truths which re-

ligion enforces. They may be of different sects; they may profess different creeds; they may even fancy that they are wide asunder from each other; but they are not. Their *practical* religion is the same. There is but one kind of practical religion in the world. It consists of those great, all-important truths, which wise and good men hold in common. It is to these truths, that we wish to give their full, unimpeded efficacy. It is these truths, which we wish to bring into action, unembarrassed and unopposed by the errors that have been connected with them. It is for these truths, which have been the master principles in forming the characters of the most excellent of men, that we wish to procure more general reception; and it is for these truths, that we would vindicate their preëminent authority. All our hopes for the welfare of man are identified with our hopes for the prevalence of true religion. And this is opposed, and has been opposed but too effectually, by those false doctrines, for which so many are yet earnestly contending. They are among the chief causes counteracting that one great cause, to which we must look almost alone for the production of good. The rational and enlightened Christian, when he finds men zealously and pertinaciously defending errors, which

grossly misrepresent our religion and expose it to disbelief and contempt, will be ready to use language like that which Tertullian addressed to the heretics of his time, *Parce spei unicæ mundi*, — "Spare the only hope of mankind."

In our endeavors to promote the influence of rational religion, what are the obstacles which present themselves? They are, in the first place, prescriptive errors and traditionary prejudices. But these are every day losing their strength. They are those selfish and vile passions, by which every effort of the moralist and philosopher, no matter what form it may assume, is equally opposed. These present, therefore, no peculiar discouragement in the present case. Are the truths for which we contend intrinsically difficult to be understood? They are not so. They are as simple and intelligible as they are sublime. The prospect which true religion opens to the mind has a beautiful and solemn grandeur, to which that of the visible heavens affords but a faint comparison; but it is with one as with the other; we need not travel far, nor search for our point of view, in order to behold all that is given us to see of the moral or of the physical universe.

Is it impossible to render the practical operation of these truths more general and effect-

ive? Is it impossible, when religion joins her voice to that which experience has been so long uttering, to make men believe and feel, at last, that their duty and their interest are the same; that the laws of God are but directions which he has given us, in his infinite wisdom and mercy, for attaining our highest happiness; that it is better to be just and benevolent, honored and beloved, than to be selfish, unjust, and cruel, despised, distrusted, and hated; that it is unwise to sacrifice a great future good to a present indulgence, which leaves behind it dissatisfaction and repentance; and that he who submits the moral part of his nature to the animal, is degrading himself, and destroying his best capacities for enjoyment? Is it impossible that the generality of men in a Christian land should be brought to act as if they really believed these truths, and truths such as these? Whether it be so or not, yet remains to be determined. The experiment has never been made. These principles have, indeed, governed the lives of many. They are familiar to the moralist, the philosopher, and the well educated man. The whole revelation of Jesus Christ was intended to enforce these truths. But they have not been enforced, nor have they been taught in the popular systems of religion.

These systems have made a wide separation between real virtue, and what they have taught men to consider as the characteristics of a Christian.

Do you believe that the religion of Spain or Italy has had an effect to elevate and purify the morals and the minds of the inhabitants of those countries, at all corresponding to the effect which true Christianity would have produced? Do you receive our faith in its purity, and can you believe that the doctrines of Calvin have had any tendency to develop the higher powers and better affections of man? Do you believe that they have flourished under such culture; and that those doctrines have really operated to produce reverence, love, and gratitude toward Him who has formed us under his curse, and active and warm-hearted benevolence toward the thoroughly depraved and inexpressibly odious beings, our fellow-men?

The tendency of every prevalent system of false religion has been to call away the attention of men from the practice of moral goodness, and to direct it to some other object. All such systems have presented some substitute for what pure religion requires. They have misapplied the sanctions of Christianity, divert-

ing them from their great purpose. They have provided some hiding-place and shelter for the baser passions; and these, in return, have often been most zealous in their defence. This is the great characteristic distinction between true religion and false; that the former directs all its motives and sanctions to the production of real moral excellence; and that the latter sets up something else as the object of its requisitions and promises. The reception of a creed, the belonging to a particular sect, zeal for the Church, zeal for orthodoxy, even a readiness to engage in the work of persecution, the infliction upon one's self of bodily torture, the practice of useless austerities, the endurance of useless privations, pardons for sin purchased with money from a miserable fellow-sinner, reliance upon substituted merit, a fancied miraculous change of character, the being elected to salvation by an arbitrary and irreversible decree, — these, and other similar distinctions and means, have all been represented, in various forms of false religion among Christians, as pledges of the favor of God, and passports to eternal happiness. Amid the triumph of these different errors, true moral excellence, the one and the only thing needful, has been regarded with about as much favor as a deposed monarch

might expect from usurpers, who had seized upon and divided his kingdom. Make yourself acquainted with the true characters of many of those with whom one or another system of false religion has peopled heaven, and consider whether it be desirable that the number of such men should be multiplied upon earth. Are we to expect any thing very much resembling the influence of true religion, from systems which hold up so false a standard of moral excellence? If we are not, the experiment is yet to be made, which shall determine what that influence may be.

It is the indissoluble union between the religious opinions of men and their moral characters, which renders the former a subject of such great interest. The controversies which exist respecting religious doctrines are not, as some seem to believe, mere disputes among theologians, about speculative opinions and scholastic subtilties; they are a contest between truth and error, upon subjects of a practical importance that cannot be estimated. They concern opinions, which lie at the very foundation of our hopes, our principles, our affections, our whole characters; and which, as they are true or false, useful or pernicious, communicate their complexion and features to the whole aspect of

society. They are controversies between truth and error respecting essential doctrines in the highest department of human knowledge. The present state of things is the result of the march of intellectual improvement, which, advancing rapidly elsewhere, has been stopped, and thrown back, by the prejudices that have intrenched themselves on religious ground. No one interested in the well-being of his fellow-men is privileged to stand aloof, and look on with indifference. There is a moral obligation upon every man, similar to that law which bound the citizens of Athens, in their civil divisions, to take part with the one side or the other. Those theologians who are engaged in defending the truth, are engaged in maintaining the great cause of intellectual improvement, of good morals, of civil and religious freedom, of rational piety, of human happiness, — of mankind. They have a right to expect the aid of all who are interested in the same objects. They have a right to expect, that those who are employed in other intellectual pursuits, and other efforts to benefit their fellow-men, will not so separate and disconnect themselves, as they have sometimes done, through misapprehension of the importance of the controversy, and through disgust at the style of reason-

ing and modes of attack, which they must encounter.

Are you interested in advancing human knowledge, and can you think it a matter of indifference, whether men hold the grossest errors, or the sublimest truths concerning the very highest subjects of speculation? You can hardly help feeling some degree of indignation and contempt toward those who condemned Galileo to the prisons of the Inquisition, for teaching the motion of the earth; or toward the men who calumniated and persecuted Harvey, because he made known the circulation of the blood. You respect the good sense and courage of those, by whom these truths were first maintained, in opposition to surrounding ignorance and prejudice. But nobody will think it too much to say, that these truths are not to be compared in importance with those which relate to the character and moral government of God, and to the condition, duty, and destination of man. You are desirous of diffusing the blessings of instruction through the community, of carrying knowledge and light to the poor man's dwelling. Is there any knowledge which will be of such value to him as the knowledge of his duty and his hopes; as that knowledge which will make him a good

citizen, which will reconcile him to his situation, and which may, at the same time, raise him to an essential equality with the most favored of mankind? You are interested, generally, in the well-being of your fellow-men; you are ready to afford your aid to those who would lessen the amount of abuses and oppressions, of crimes and miseries, which prey upon society; you admire the intense energy of moral feeling which carried Howard, as a minister of good, wherever human wretchedness was to be found; you know how to estimate the patient, untired, unyielding efforts of those who have almost succeeded in relieving the civilized world from the curse and the infamy of the slave-trade; you at least give your good wishes to those who would save mankind from the guilt and the horrors of war; you are interested in every plan of enlightened benevolence; — is it possible, then, that you can be uninterested in asserting the character of those truths which are the support of all the social virtues, and without the belief of which, true, self-denying, persevering benevolence would find no dwelling-place on earth? The belief of these truths has formed the characters of that class of men in society, on which the good order and happiness of the community depend, and from which

alone you can look for safe auxiliaries in any endeavor to reform the evils which are in the world, and to improve the human condition. This belief alone can give birth to that disinterested love of virtue, and of mankind, which pursues its object through good report and evil report, through opposition, and danger, and suffering; and has pursued it even into the arms of death. It is this belief which creates the well-disposed citizen, the real patriot, and the enlightened and practical philosopher. If you doubt the value of true religion, look to experience, and look to human nature. If you do not doubt it, can you fail to give your aid to those who would vindicate its character and extend its influence?

VIEWS OF CALVINISM.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

SHORTLY after the appearance of the preceding tract, the truth of the representation given in it of some of the doctrines of Calvinism (see p. 107) was denied in a periodical work entitled the "Christian Spectator," published at New Haven. This denial led me to make a full statement of those doctrines in an article first published in the "Christian Disciple" for July and August, 1822. The substance of this article is contained in the tract which follows. I have omitted those portions which were only of temporary interest and immaterial to the main object in view, the giving of a correct account of Calvinism, and I have added a few remarks at the end. For the most part, it is, as my purpose required, little more than a mere compilation. The observation is perhaps unnecessary, that the system of doctrines about to be set forth has been called Calvinism, not because it had its origin with Calvin, but because he has been looked up to as its most conspicuous defender.

Some readers may be disposed to ask why so shocking an exhibition should be made at the present day. No one now, they may say, or at least no considerable body of men, asserts the truth of these doctrines. They may be inclined to turn away from their exhibition with some resentment that

so painful a spectacle should be brought before them, and a vague feeling of incredulity as to the possibility that such doctrines have been believed. It is indeed an article not suited to every class of readers ; but to the student of human nature, to him who would know what men can believe and how they can feel, to him who recognizes the importance of the history of opinions, and especially of the history of human errors respecting religion and Christianity, the phenomenon that these doctrines have prevailed so widely among Protestants, and even extended into the Romish Church, — possessing the minds of such men as Pascal and the Port-Royalists, — this phenomenon is one of the most instructive facts to which he can direct his attention.

But it may still be objected, that such an exhibition is, at all events, not required for the removal of errors now existing, — that these errors have become obsolete. A controversy (principally conducted by other hands) followed the publication of the " Views of Calvinism," and one of the last publications of the writer or writers in the " Christian Spectator " contained the following passage, in which the objection just stated is implied : —

" What Calvin believed and taught, and what any modern Calvinistic authors have taught, are questions of no real importance in the present discussion, any farther than their opinions are proved to be prevalent in our own times and in our own country. If therefore the Professor of Sacred Literature in Cambridge University thinks it an object worthy his zeal and labor to collect and expose the opinions of other centuries, or even the individual opinions of some in our own age, let him have the candour frankly to acquaint the public with his design."

Before remarking on the objection I have mentioned, it may be observed incidentally, that in my statement, the truth

of which was so confidently denied, and the truth of which, therefore, was not only of real importance in the discussion, but the sole point at issue, I said nothing about the question whether the doctrines alleged were prevalent in this country or not. I did not undertake to determine (for it was wholly aside from my purpose) whether all those who called themselves Calvinists were really Calvinists.

Calvinism, it is contended, has undergone a change. It is not now the system of doctrines that was maintained by Calvin, and the Synod of Dort, and the Westminster Assembly, and which has made its way into the Articles of the Church of England and into the creeds of so many other Protestant sects. It may be said that it now exists, for the most part, in a qualified and mitigated form. But its original doctrines are still taught in the creeds of Protestant sects, as the characteristic doctrines of Christianity. If some belief resembling that expressed in those doctrines is to be received as true, and can be presented in a form less revolting to our reason and our moral sentiments, those creeds should be remodelled, and the less offensive teaching, which is supposed to be true, should be substituted for the more offensive, which is acknowledged to be false. But the doctrines of Calvinism do not admit of being qualified or mitigated. All that can be done by way of removing their offence is to keep them out of view, and to present in popular discourses other doctrines, which may appear to be, but are not, inconsistent with them. Take, for example, the Calvinistic doctrine of reprobation, which teaches that a large portion of mankind are born into the world doomed by God to be wholly inclined to all moral evil, and to suffer everlasting misery. What is the veil which has been thrown over this doctrine to conceal its hideousness? It is this, — we are told that if we perish the fault is wholly our own; that we can

obey God's laws and save ourselves from misery if we will. But this is only a wretched concealment of the Calvinistic doctrine, a subterfuge which is disdainfully rejected by Calvin himself. It is simply a prevarication; the assertion of a virtual falsehood in the guise of truth. The real truth of which it presents a false semblance is the very opposite of Calvinism. What Calvinism teaches is, that we are born with such natures that we cannot will to obey the laws of God. Yet the assertion that we can obey his laws if we will, it being understood that we cannot will to do so, is perhaps the most plausible piece of sophistry which has been brought forward in the attempt to exhibit Calvinism in a mitigated form.

In the existing state of things, when ignorance and misjudgment concerning every thing connected with Christianity have spread so widely, and so much indifference to religious Truth exists, it is not improbable that many who call themselves Calvinists have but a vague and fluctuating faith in their creed. I do not question that the same is true in regard to other great errors which have been represented as essential to our religion. No one can doubt that there are many who make a public profession of belief in creeds which they do not believe. Their incredulity by no means diminishes the injury done to Christianity by those creeds to which they give their countenance, or palliates the wrong which they perpetrate against their fellow-men in misguiding them from the truth, or repelling them from it, by substituting falsehood in its place. These professed believers are among the most culpable of the supporters of error. He who really believes even such a system as I am about to set forth, may think he has some justification or excuse in propounding it to others. He may so deceive himself as thus to think; — though, in fact, if the system were true, if the

greater part of men, as it teaches, are born under a curse, foredoomed to eternal sin and eternal misery, it would be difficult to imagine what good might be hoped from its general, untempered reception.

This system, however, is presented in the creeds of a very large portion of Protestants. It still operates on many minds, corrupting the faith of some and driving away others from our religion. It still has zealous and confident defenders. In lately turning over a number of a journal of some celebrity, "The North British Review," (that for February, 1851,) I met with the following passage: —

"We are bold to say, that Calvinism is the doctrine of the Established Churches of England and Scotland; and if its tenets are an outrage to reason and derogatory to God, these Churches are no longer temples of truth, but synagogues of error. We venture also to declare it to be our own opinion, that Calvinism is the highest philosophy and the truest religion. If it is not philosophy, man is without Reason: — If it is not religion, he is without Revelation." — p. 566.

In another part of the same number, in complaining of what is called "an utter misrepresentation of Calvinism" by the author of "Alton Locke," this assertion is made: — "Calvinism is, when properly stated, the noblest formal and systematized expression that has ever been given to the world of those transcendent relations that bind man to the supernatural and the infinite." — p. 390, note.

From the following article one may learn what that system is which is thus celebrated as "the highest philosophy and the truest religion," and judge how far it is capable of being misrepresented to its prejudice.

VIEWS OF CALVINISM.

In the preceding tract, the following passage occurs: —

"True religion is an inestimable blessing; because it teaches that God is the everlasting Friend and Father of his creatures, a God of infinite goodness. But what shall we say of a religion which teaches that he has formed men so that they are by nature wholly inclined to all moral evil; that he has determined in consequence to inflict upon the greater part of our race the most terrible punishments; and that, unless he has seen fit to place us among the small number of those whom he has chosen out of the common ruin, he will be our eternal enemy and infinite tormentor; that, having hated us from our birth, he will continue to exercise upon us for ever his unrelenting and omnipotent hatred! Whatever may be the worth of true religion, it surely does not follow, that this system of blasphemy must be also of great value, and very beneficial in its effects. Yet he must be a very ignorant, or a very bold man, who will affirm, that the doctrines last stated have not been taught, and very extensively too, as fundamental doctrines of Christianity."

As I have mentioned in the Introductory

Note to the present article, the truth of this representation was denied in a periodical publication of the day, — in which it was said: —

"Did not the author know, when he penned this passage, that 'this system of blasphemy' never was taught, or professed 'extensively, as fundamental doctrines of Christianity'? — that there never was a sect, or body of men, denominated Christian, who would not reject it as false and injurious, if presented to them as their creed? — that there never was an individual author, of any celebrity or influence, who ever taught, or undertook to defend, such doctrines? This, at least, he must have known, that neither 'the Institutes of Calvin,' nor 'the works of the Westminster Assembly,' nor any of the Protestant Confessions of Faith, and, least of all, the confessions of those to whom he intended it should be applied, contain doctrines which are fairly represented by any clause of the foregoing extract. How are we then astonished, when to this injurious representation the author has the effrontery to add — 'he must be a very ignorant, or a very bold man, who will affirm, that the doctrines last stated have not been taught, and very extensively too, as fundamental doctrines of Christianity.' The *boldness*, or the *ignorance*, plainly belongs to the man who could bring such a charge against an extensive class of the Christian community — a charge which cannot be substantiated by fair quotations from any standard author, or any public confession of faith."

The purpose of the following exposition is to show, that there is no misstatement of the doctrines of Calvinism in the passage remarked upon.

The propositions impliedly asserted in this passage to be doctrines of Calvinism are the following: —

1. That God has formed men.

2. That they are so formed, or, in other words, that God has so formed them, that they are by nature wholly inclined to all moral evil.

3. That, in consequence of this nature, God inflicts on those who remain as they were thus formed to be, the most terrible punishments; that he will be their eternal enemy and infinite tormentor; that, having hated them from their birth, he will continue to exercise upon them for ever his unrelenting and omnipotent hatred.

4. That, though he has chosen some to be saved out of the common ruin, their number is comparatively small.

In showing these to be doctrines of Calvinism I shall use but few authorities, but they will be authorities of the highest character. If the case required it, an indefinite number of others might be adduced.

As to the first proposition, that God has formed men, or that God is our Creator, — that, whatever we are when we come into existence, he forms us such as we are, — I trust there will be no dispute. I suppose no one will deny it

to be a doctrine of Calvinism, that God is the Creator of men.

The second proposition is, that, when formed or created by God, men are so formed that they are wholly inclined to all moral evil.

So says the Westminster Assembly's Larger Catechism.

"The Fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery. . . . . The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consisteth in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually; which is commonly called Original Sin, and from which do proceed all actual transgressions." — *Answers* 23, 25.

So says the Westminster Assembly's Confession.

"Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto." — Ch. IX. § 3.

In these passages is described the present state of men, as they come into the world from the hands of their Creator. Nobody, I suppose, can be weak enough to imagine that the circumstance, that the fall of Adam is assigned as the cause why men are in this state, affects

the correctness of the account I have given of the state itself as here described.

The following passage is from Calvin's "Short Formula of a Confession of Faith": —

"I confess that in Original Sin are comprehended blindness of mind and perversity of heart; so that we are entirely despoiled and destitute of every thing connected with eternal life; so that even our very natural faculties are all depraved and contaminated. Whence it is that we are moved from within by no thought to do well. Wherefore I detest those who ascribe to us any freedom of will, by which we may prepare ourselves to receive the grace of God; or by which we may of ourselves coöperate with the Holy Spirit, which may be given us." — *Tractatus Theologici.* Opp. VIII. 90, 91. Ed. Amst. 1667 - 71.

The words immediately preceding this confession are these: —

"We are every one of us born infected with Original Sin, and from ourmother's womb are under the curse of God, and a sentence of damnation; and this not on account of another's sin only, but on account of the wickedness which is within us even when it does not show itself."

The following account of Original Sin was given by the famous Synod of Dort: —

"All men are conceived in sin, and born children of wrath, without ability for any good tending to salvation, inclined to evil, dead in sins, and slaves of sin; and, without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, have neither will nor power to return to God, to correct their depraved

nature, or to dispose themselves to its correction." — *Acta Synodi Dordrechti habitæ* (Lugd. Batav. 1620), p. 256.

The first article of their "Canons" of Christian faith is this: —

"As all men have sinned in Adam and become obnoxious to a curse and eternal death, God would have done injustice to no one, if he had willed to leave the whole human race in sin, and under a curse, and to damn them on account of sin; — *ac propter peccatum damnare.*" — *Ibid.* p. 241.

The following is the account in the "Confession of the Belgic Churches," finally approved and adopted by the Synod.

"We believe that, by the disobedience of Adam, Original Sin was diffused through the whole race of man; which is the corruption of the whole nature and an hereditary depravity, by which even infants are polluted in their mother's womb, and from which as a root every kind of sin is produced in man; and thus it is so vile and execrable in the sight of God, that it is sufficient for the condemnation of the human race." — *Ibid.* p. 305.

President Edwards has the reputation of being the most able expositor and defender of Calvinism in modern times. His views respecting the nature with which men are born appear in the following passages.

"I now proceed to say, that mankind are all naturally in such a state, as is attended, without fail, with this consequence or issue, that they universally run themselves into that, which is, in effect, their own utter, eternal perdition, as

being finally accursed of God, and the subjects of his remediless wrath through sin." — *On Original Sin.* Works (Worcester ed., 1808 – 9), VI. 137.

"If by flesh and spirit, when spoken of in the New Testament, and opposed to each other, in discourses on the necessary qualifications for salvation, we are to understand what has been now supposed, it will not only follow that men are corrupt by nature, but *wholly corrupt*, without any good thing. If by flesh is meant man's nature, as he receives it in his first birth, then *therein dwelleth no good thing;* as appears by Rom. vii. 18. It is wholly opposite to God and to subjection to his law; as appears by Rom. viii. 7, 8. It is directly contrary to true holiness, and wholly opposes it, and holiness is opposite to that; as appears by Gal. v. 17. So long as men are in their natural state, they not only have no good thing, but it is impossible they should have or do any good thing." — *Ibid.* p. 322.

"So that, on the whole, there is sufficient reason to understand the Apostle, when he speaks of the *natural* man in that 1 Cor. ii. 14, as meaning man in his native, corrupt state. And his words represent him as totally corrupt, wholly a stranger and enemy to true virtue or holiness, and things appertaining to it, which it appears are commonly intended in the New Testament by things *spiritual*, and are doubtless here meant by *things of the Spirit of God.* These words also represent that it is impossible man should be otherwise while in his natural state." — *Ibid.* p. 324.

"If the Scriptures represent all mankind as wicked in their first state, before they are made partakers of the benefits of Christ's redemption, then they are wicked by nature; for doubtless men's first state is their native state, or the state they come into the world in. But the Scriptures do thus represent all mankind." — *Ibid.* p. 325.

"If it be so with all mankind, that as soon as ever they are capable of reflecting and knowing their own moral state, they find themselves wicked, this proves that they are wicked by nature; either born wicked, or born with an infallible disposition to be wicked as soon as possible, if there be any difference between these, and either of them will prove men to be born exceedingly depraved." — *Ibid.* pp. 325, 326.

It is unnecessary to adduce a larger number of passages to the present point, especially as most of those to be quoted under the heads which immediately follow bear directly upon it.

The next proposition which is to be proved a doctrine of Calvinism is this: — That, in consequence of the nature which has been described as common to all men, God inflicts on those who retain the nature with which he formed them the most terrible punishments; that he will be their eternal enemy and infinite tormentor; that, having hated them from their birth, he will continue to exercise upon them for ever his unrelenting and omnipotent hatred.

This doctrine is thus stated by the Westminster Divines in their Larger Catechism: —

"The Fall brought upon mankind the loss of communion with God, his displeasure and curse, so as we are by nature children of wrath, bond-slaves to Satan, and justly liable to all punishments in this world, and that which is to come.

"The punishments of sin in this world are either inward, as blindness of mind, a reprobate sense, strong delusions, hardness of heart, horror of conscience, and vile affections; or outward, as the curse of God upon the creatures for our sakes, and all other evils that befall us in our bodies, names, estates, relations, and employments, together with death itself.

"The punishments of sin in the world to come are everlasting separation from the comfortable presence of God, and most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hell-fire for ever." — *Anss.* 27 - 29.

To all these punishments we are, it is to be observed, justly liable for what we are by nature.

Calvin, in the second book of his Institutes, Ch. I. § 8, defines Original Sin to be "the hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, extending to every part of the mind, which, in the first place, makes us justly liable to the wrath of God (*quæ primum facit reos iræ Dei*); and next produces those works in us, which the Scripture calls the works of the flesh."

Whether Calvin was likely to shrink from the doctrine which I have stated, as too horrible to make a part of his system, may be judged from the following passage, where he is treating of predestination.

"With regard to those whom God created for contumely in life and for eternal death, that they might be vessels of

his wrath, and examples of his severity; he, in order that they may come to their appointed end, at one time deprives them of the power of hearing his word, and at another blinds and stupefies them the more by its preaching." — *Institut.* Lib. III. c. 24. § 12.

Respecting the natural state of man, I will add a few more passages from Calvin.

"By nature, we are heirs of eternal damnation, because the whole human race was cursed in Adam." — *Adversus Franciscanum. Tractt. Theol.* Opp. VIII. 403.

"We do not say, that any new nature was transmitted to us by Adam, but that God by a just judgment pronounced a curse upon us in Adam, and willed that we, on account of his sin, should be born in a state of corruption — *Novam ergo naturam nobis ab Adamo traditam esse non dicimus, sed Deum justo judicio nobis in ipso maledixisse, ac voluisse nos, ob illius peccatum, corruptos nasci.*" — *Ibid.* p. 405.

"I acknowledge this to be my doctrine, that not merely by the permission of God, but by his secret counsel, Adam fell, and by his fall drew all his posterity into eternal ruin. . . . . One fell, and all were brought under punishment; nor this alone; through the sin of one all receive contagion, and are born corrupted, and infected with a deadly taint. What, my good censor, do you say to this? Will you charge God with cruelty, because he cast down all his offspring to destruction through the fall of one man? For though Adam ruined himself and his descendants, yet we must ascribe the corruption, and the state of guilt, in man, to the secret judgment of God; for the sin of one man would have been nothing to us, if the heavenly judge had not condemned us to eternal destruc-

tion." — *Calumniæ Nebulonis et Calvini Respons.*, Art. I. *Tractt. Theol.* Opp. VIII. 634.

"If any one attack us with such an inquiry as this, why God has from the beginning predestinated some men to death, who, not yet being brought into existence, could not deserve the sentence of death, we, by way of answer, will ask them * in return what they suppose God owes to man, if he chooses to judge him conformably to man's own nature. As we are all corrupted by sin, we must necessarily be odious to God, and that not from tyrannical cruelty, but according to the most equitable rules of justice. If all whom God predestinates to death are in their natural condition liable to the sentence of death, of what injustice to themselves, I pray, can they complain? Let all the sons of Adam come forward; let them contend and dispute with their Creator, because, by his eternal providence, they were, before their birth, adjudged to endless misery. What murmur will they be able to raise against this vindication, when God on the other hand shall call them to a review of themselves? If they are all taken from a corrupt mass, it is no wonder if they all lie under a sentence of damnation. Let them not therefore accuse God of injustice, if by his eternal decree they are destined to death, to which they feel themselves led on by their own nature, of itself, whether they will or not — *ad quam* [*mortem*] *a suâ ipsorum naturâ sponte se perduci, velint nolint, ipsi sentiunt.*" — *Institut.* Lib. III. c. 23. § 3.

The purpose of the third of Edwards's "Fifteen Sermons" is to prove, that *men are naturally God's enemies*, which words are the title

* So in the original.

of the sermon. His third inference is: "From this doctrine you may learn how dreadful the condition of natural man is"; that is, how dreadful the condition of men is as created by God; they are by their very nature sinners, enemies of God, children of wrath, and justly liable to infinite, inconceivable torments.

In his sermon entitled, "Sinners in the Hands of an angry God," he says: —

"So that thus it is, that natural men are held in the hand of God over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked, his anger is as great toward them as to those that are actually suffering the executions of the fierceness of his wrath in hell; . . . . . the devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and would fain lay hold on them and swallow them up." — *Works*, VII. 493.

Again, from the same sermon: —

"They are now the objects of that very same anger and wrath of God, that is expressed in the torments of hell: and the reason why they do not go down to hell at each moment is not because God, in whose power they are, is not then very angry with them; as angry as he is with many of those miserable creatures that he is now tormenting in hell, and do there feel and bear the fierceness of his wrath." — *Ibid.* p. 489.

The following words from the same discourse are addressed to all the unregenerate, —

to all those who retain the nature given them by God at their birth, not having been born again, in the Calvinistic use of that phrase.

"The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes, as the most hateful and venomous serpent is in ours." — *Ibid.* p. 496.

The doctrine that all human beings are brought into existence with natures which make them proper objects of divine vengeance, when it is extended to such as during their being here have *manifestly* had no power of doing good or avoiding evil, — that is to say, when extended to infants, — becomes, though in no respect more repugnant to reason, yet so shocking to the feelings, that some who have received the doctrine in the gross have shrunk from this application of it. But on this subject, as might be supposed, Calvin was consistent. He says: —

"Even infants bring their damnation with them from their mother's womb; for although they have not yet produced the fruits of their iniquity, they have the seed of it inclosed within them. Nay, their whole nature is, as it

were, a seed of sin; so that it cannot be otherwise than odious and abominable to God." — *Institut.* Lib. IV. c. 15. § 10; conf. Lib. II. c. 1. § 8.

In one place he indignantly disavows the opposite opinion.

"As if I denied that the whole race of Adam is, by nature, under a curse, so that even infants before being born to light are liable to eternal death." — *Append. Lib. de verâ Eccles. reform. Ratione. Tractt. Theol.* Opp. VIII. 301.

In his tract "On the Hidden Providence of God," in answer to Castalio, he says: —

"You deny that it is lawful for God to damn any one unless for actual transgression. Innumerable infants are taken from life. Put forth now your virulence against God, who plunges into eternal death harmless infants (*innoxios fœtus*) torn from their mothers' breasts. He who will not detest this blasphemy [the blasphemy of Castalio in denying it to be lawful for God so to deal with infants] may revile me at his pleasure. For it cannot be demanded that I should be safe and free from the railings of those who do not spare God." — *Tractt. Theol.* Opp. VIII. 644.

The scheme which Calvin maintained, and to which his name has been given, was essentially coincident with that of his predecessor Luther. The following passage is from Luther's treatise "On the Servitude of the Will" (*De servo Arbitrio*).

"If any one should object, that it is difficult to defend

the mercy and justice of God, inasmuch as he condemns the undeserving (*immeritos*), that is, those who are impious only because they are born in impiety, and have no power, in any way, to do any thing to save themselves from remaining impious and being condemned, but are forced by a necessity of nature to sin and perish, conformably to what Paul says: 'We were all children of wrath like others,' — seeing that they were created such by God himself from seed corrupted by the sin of one man, Adam; — I answer, That we must honor and reverence the great mercy of God toward those whom he justifies and saves, though most unworthy; and that we must defer something at least to the divine wisdom, so as to believe God just, when he may appear to us unjust. For if his justice were such that human apprehension might perceive it to be just, it plainly would not be divine, and would differ in nothing from human justice." — Opp. II. fol. 485, vo. Witebergæ, 1562.

Dr. Twiss was one of the most eminent Calvinists of his day, the Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly. In his "Vindication of the Grace, Power, and Providence of God," he puts forward and defends this aspect of the Calvinistic doctrine. In one passage he says: —

"The sin of Adam, I confess, was not ours as perpetrated by us in our proper persons; but was rather the sin of our nature than of our persons. But we existed even then in the loins of Adam, as Levi did in those of Abraham, when the latter paid tithes to Melchisedec; and his sin is made ours by the imputation of God; so that it has exposed innumerable infants to Divine wrath, who were guilty of this sin, and of no other." — Lib. III. p. 21. Ed. 2da. 4to. Amst. 1632.

This being but a particular application of a general doctrine, we may not expect to find it specifically stated in Calvinistic creeds and catechisms. In the Westminster Assembly's Confession (Ch. X.) *elect* infants are spoken of in contradistinction from others; which implies that there are others who are reprobate. But in works intended for the use of the unlearned, the wretched condition of infants has been often brought into view, apparently with the purpose of producing a more awful impression on the mind of the reader. Thus, in what was one of the most popular books of the kind, Boston's "Human Nature in its Fourfold State," the author says: —

"Surely we are not born innocent. These chains of wrath, which by nature are upon us, speak us to be born criminals. The swaddling-bands wherewith infants are bound hand and foot, as soon as they are born, may put us in mind of the cords of wrath with which they are held prisoners as children of wrath." — p. 122. Ed. 13th. 1763.

Concerning the case of these reprobates, sinners before being moral agents, some Calvinists have been inclined to think that their future condition would not be worse than non-existence. But this supposition, says Edwards,

"to me appears plainly a giving up that grand point of the imputation of Adam's sin, both in whole and in part.

For it supposes it to be not right for God to bring any evil on a child of Adam, which is innocent as to personal sin, without paying for it, or balancing it with good ; so that still the state of the child shall be as good as could be demanded in justice in case of mere innocence. Which plainly supposes that the child is not exposed to any proper punishment at all, or is not at all in debt to divine justice on the account of Adam's sin. . . . . .

"It seems to me pretty manifest that none can, in good consistence with themselves, own a real imputation of the guilt of Adam's first sin to his posterity, without owning that they are justly viewed and treated as sinners, truly guilty and children of wrath on that account ; nor unless they allow a just imputation of the whole of the evil of that transgression ; at least, all that pertains to the essence of that act, as a full and complete violation of the covenant which God had established ; even as much as if each one of mankind had the like covenant established with him singly, and had by the like direct and full act of rebellion violated it for himself." — *On Original Sin.* Works, VI. 462, 463.

If, indeed, God do create men with a nature which necessarily makes them objects of his vengeance, and for the purpose of exercising this vengeance upon them, it is of no consequence whether the interval between their creation and their sufferings be longer or shorter, — whether he keep them in this world an hour or a century. If, as moral agents, they can do nothing to deliver themselves from his curse, it is of no consequence whether those on whom his curse is inflicted are what may be called

moral agents or not. If he form men with moral natures wholly inclined to all evil, under an absolute decree of reprobation, he might, in equal consistency with justice, form them with such natures and place them in hell at once.

In many of the preceding passages there is a reference to Adam, as having some agency in causing all mankind to be brought into the world with such natures as have been described. He has been interposed to shield the Creator from any imputation of injustice or cruelty.

"If any one," says Calvin, "will dispute with God, and attempt to evade his judgment by this pretext, that he could not have acted otherwise than he has done, God has this answer ready, which we have elsewhere adduced, that it arises not from the creation, but from the corruption of human nature, that men being enslaved to sin can will nothing but what is evil. For whence proceeds that impotence, which the wicked are so ready to bring forward as a pretext, but from this, that Adam voluntarily devoted himself to the service of the Devil? Hence that corruption by whose chains we are held bound; because the first man revolted from his Maker. If all men are justly regarded as guilty of this revolt, let them not think themselves excused by necessity." — *Institut.* Lib. II. c. 5. § 1.

The Calvinistic doctrine concerning the nature of the connection between Adam's sin and the guilt and misery of mankind is not well set-

tled. Perhaps the most common account of it is this: — Adam is represented as the "federal head" (to borrow a term from the language of the system) of the whole human race, considered collectively. With him, it is taught, God entered into a covenant, the terrible penalties for the breach of which were, through him as a "public person," incurred equally by all his descendants as by himself. Thus it is said in the Westminster Assembly's Larger Catechism: —

"The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression." — *Ans.* 22.

Other Calvinists have given different views, as, for example, Dr. Twiss, in the passage quoted from him on p. 181; and Calvin himself, in the passages quoted on p. 176, in one of which he says, "The sin of one man would have been nothing to us, if the Heavenly Judge had not condemned us to eternal destruction."

In the Articles of the Church of England, nothing is affirmed, except negatively, concerning the relation between the sin of Adam and the ruin of mankind. The ninth Article, "On Original Sin," teaches as follows: —

"Original Sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault or corrup-

tion of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the Flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit, and, therefore, in every person born into the world it deserveth God's wrath and damnation."

As there can be no guilt in being born, it follows that this guilt is contracted by every person before his birth. It is implied that it is in some way connected with Adam, but in what manner it is so connected is not explained. The birth of a man is commonly regarded as the commencement of his existence, at least of his existence as a moral being; but, notwithstanding this, the only partial solution of the problem seems to be that before quoted from Dr. Twiss, that when Adam sinned, "we existed even then in his loins, as Levi did in those of Abraham, when the latter paid tithes to Melchisedec." To complete this solution we must add another idea, — that we existed and were consenting to his sin.

Perhaps Calvin has nowhere explained his views on this subject more fully than in his Commentary on Ephesians ii. 3. The words of the text, as they stand in our Common Version, it will be recollected, are these: — "We were by nature the children of wrath, even as

others." * Upon this text Calvin observes, that by "children of wrath" is meant nothing else than "ruined, worthy of eternal death"; that it is equivalent to "condemned before God," *coram Deo damnati.* It is a remarkable passage, he says, against the Pelagians. "Paul bears testimony that we are born with sin, as serpents bring their poison with them from the womb." "Where there is condemnation, there must of necessity be sin, because God is angry, not with innocent men, but with sin." Upon this, he says, a question may arise: "How, seeing that God is the author of nature, he can be without blame, if we are ruined by nature?" "I answer," he says, "that there are two kinds of nature; the first was originally made by God, the second is the corruption of the former. The condemnation, therefore, of which Paul speaks, by no means flows from God, but from

* The proper meaning of these words I conceive to be this: — "We were by nature as much exposed to punishment as the rest of men"; that is, WE Jewish Christians (of whom St. Paul is here speaking, in contradistinction from the Gentile converts whom he is addressing) had no peculiar claim to the favor of God, on account of our natural descent from Abraham and the other patriarchs. That the Jews believed they had a special right to the favor of God, merely on this ground, appears from the Scriptures, the Rabbinical writings, and other sources of evidence. This opinion is alluded to by John the Baptist, when he says, "Think not to say to yourselves, We have Abraham for our father."

a depraved nature, because we are not now born as Adam was created in the beginning, but are an adulterate seed from a degenerate and corrupt man."

The reasoning of Calvin appears to be this: — God created Adam with a nature very different from ours; but Adam committed a great sin, and therefore it is just in God to bring us into the world with natures that necessarily make us objects of his vengeance. The inconsequence of this conclusion is rendered a little more glaring when viewed in connection with another doctrine, — that the fall of Adam, so called, with all its supposed results, was foreordained by God and the necessary effect of his will.

On the doctrine just referred to, the doctrine of "God's Decrees," as it is called, the whole system of Calvinism rests. It teaches that the character and condition of men are determined in this life, and through eternity, by the absolute decrees of God, irrespectively of any thing they can do for themselves. Thus, "according to his sovereign power and the unsearchable counsel of his own will," he has determined that the reprobate should be born with sinful natures, that they should for ever be sinners, and consequently eternal objects of his ven-

geance. This doctrine annihilates at once all those evasions of the truth, those imagined meliorations of the system, which have been supposed capable of reconciling it with our reason, if not with our moral feelings.

The character of the doctrine appears in the following passages.

"All things," says Calvin, "being at God's disposal, and the decision of salvation or death belonging to him, he orders all things by his counsel and decree in such a manner, that some men are born devoted from the womb to certain death; that his name may be glorified in their destruction. If any one should pretend, that no necessity is imposed upon them by the foreknowledge of God, but rather that such is the condition under which they have been created, in consequence of his foreknowledge of their future depravity, he will say what is partly true, but not the whole truth. . . . . If God merely foresaw the fates of men, and did not also dispose and fix them by his determination, there would be room to agitate the question, whether his foresight rendered them at all necessary. But, since he foresees future events only in consequence of his decree that they shall take place, it is useless to dispute about the proper inference from foreknowledge, while it is certain that all things come to pass by ordination and decree." — *Institut.* Lib. III. c. 23. § 6.

In answer to those who say "that it is nowhere declared in express terms that God decreed that Adam should perish by his defection," Calvin replies, in the next section to that just quoted: —

"But predestination, whether they will or not, shows itself in his posterity. For it was not a natural consequence (*neque enim factum est naturaliter*) that all men should lose salvation through the guilt of their first parent. What then prevents them from confessing that to be true in relation to one man, which they reluctantly concede in relation to all the rest of mankind? Why should they waste time in sophistical evasions? The Scripture proclaims, that all men were, in the person of one, given over to eternal death. As this cannot be regarded as a natural consequence (*hoc quum naturæ ascribi nequeat*), it is evident that it must have been the result of the wonderful counsel of God. That these pious defenders of the justice of God should stick at trifles, while they leap over great difficulties, is too absurd. Again, I ask, How has it come to pass, that the fall of Adam has involved so many nations with their infant children in eternal death without remedy, but because such was the will of God? ..... It is a dreadful decree, I confess."

Decretum quidem horribile, fateor. Calvin was not given to human relentings, and the words are worth preserving as a matter of curiosity.

"The reprobate," says Calvin, "would be thought excusable in sinning, because they cannot avoid the necessity of sinning, especially as this necessity is imposed upon them by the ordinance of God. But we deny this to be a just excuse; since the ordinance of God, by which they complain that they are destined to destruction, is conformable to equity, unknown indeed to us, but indubitably certain." — *Ibid.* § 9.

I have observed in the Introductory Note, that Calvin regarded with contempt the subterfuge which has been resorted to by some of his followers in saying, that "every one may be saved if he will," that "men transgress and suffer only of their free choice"; — it being maintained at the same time, that "man by his fall hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation"; or, as the Church of England expresses it, that "the condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God." The object of Calvin in the second chapter of the second book of his Institutes, as stated in its title, is, to prove that "man in his present state is despoiled of freedom of will, and subjected to a miserable slavery." He quotes and opposes the opinions of different writers, who thought that freedom of will might in one sense or another be ascribed to man, and finally mentions that of Peter Lombard. Lombard, he says, "decides that our will is free, not because we are equally able to do or to think what is good or what is evil; but only because we are free from compulsion (*coactione soluti sumus*); which liberty may exist, notwithstanding we are corrupted, and

are slaves of sin, and can do nothing but sin." Upon which Calvin remarks: —

"According to this, man will be said to possess freedom of will, not because he has a free choice equally of good and evil, but because he does evil conformably to his will and not by compulsion. This is very true; but what purpose was to be answered by giving so proud a title to a thing of so little importance? An admirable kind of liberty indeed, if man be under no compulsion to serve sin, but is yet such a willing slave, that his will is held bound by the fetters of sin. I abominate disputes about words, by which the Church is disturbed without any good result; but I think we ought religiously to avoid those words which appear to express an absurdity; especially on a subject respecting which there are pernicious errors. For how many are there, I pray, who, when they hear freedom of will ascribed to man, do not immediately conceive of him as master of his own mind and will, so as to be able of himself to turn to either side [either good or evil]? But it may be said that this danger will be removed, if the common people are carefully informed of the sense in which the term is used. This is not true; the human mind is of itself so prone to false opinions, that it will more readily imbibe error from a single word, than truth from a long discourse." — § 7.

Such was the opinion of Calvin concerning that abuse of language which has been resorted to; and so far was he from asserting, that men "transgress and suffer only of their free choice."

I return to the subject of the Divine Decrees.

In the Westminster Assembly's Larger Catechism, the doctrine concerning them is thus stated: —

"God's decrees are the wise, free, and holy acts of the counsel of his will; whereby, from all eternity, he hath, for his own glory, unchangeably foreordained whatsoever comes to pass in time; especially concerning angels and men.

"God, by an eternal and immutable decree, out of his mere love, for the praise of his glorious grace, to be manifested in due time, hath elected some angels to glory, and in Christ hath chosen some men to eternal life, and the means thereof; and also, according to his sovereign power and the unsearchable counsel of his own will (whereby he extendeth or withholdeth favor as he pleaseth), hath passed by, and foreordained the rest to dishonor and wrath, to be for their sin inflicted, to the praise of the glory of his justice." — *Anss.* 12, 13.

The following is from Edwards's "Miscellaneous Observations concerning the Divine Decrees and Election": —

"God decrees all things, and even all sins. . . . . God determines the limits of men's lives. . . . . If the limits of men's lives are determined, men's free actions must be determined, and even their sins; for their lives often depend on such acts." — *Works*, V. 378, 379.

The purpose of God in creation, and in his decrees respecting his creatures, is thus explained by Edwards: —

"The moral rectitude and fitness of the disposition, in-

clination, or affection of God's heart, does chiefly consist in a respect or regard to himself, infinitely above his regard to all other beings; or, in other words, his holiness consists in this.

"And if it be thus fit that God should have a supreme regard to himself, then it is fit that this supreme regard should appear in those things by which he makes himself known, or by his *word* and *works;* i. e. in what he says, and in what he does. If it be an infinitely amiable thing in God that he should have a supreme regard to himself, then it is an amiable thing that he should act as having a chief regard to himself." — *Concerning the End for which God created the World.* Works, VI. 23, 24.

Accordingly, Edwards undertakes to prove, that "God manifests a supreme and ultimate regard to himself in all his works"; that "God's glory is an ultimate end of the creation"; and that "God created the world for his name, to make his perfections known, and that he made it for his praise." — *Ibid.* pp. 34, 68, 87.

It is not here explained how God's "supreme regard to himself" operates to produce the decree of reprobation. The explanation is elsewhere given by Edwards. This decree is at once "to glorify his justice" and to show forth "his mighty power" as manifested in inflicting vengeance on the unconverted. In his Sermon entitled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" he says, addressing the unconverted: —

"The misery you are exposed to is that which God will inflict to that end, that he might show what that wrath of Jehovah is. God hath had it on his heart to show to angels and men, both how excellent his love is, and also how terrible his wrath is. Sometimes earthly kings have a mind to show how terrible their wrath is, by the extreme punishments they would execute on those that provoke them. Nebuchadnezzar, that mighty and haughty monarch of the Chaldean empire, was willing to show his wrath when enraged with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and accordingly gave order that the burning fiery furnace should be heated seven times hotter than it was before; doubtless, it was raised to the utmost degree of fierceness that human art could raise it; but the great God is also willing to show his wrath, and magnify his awful majesty and mighty power in the extreme sufferings of his enemies. . . . . And seeing this is his design, and what he has determined, to show how terrible the unmixed, unrestrained wrath, the fury, and fierceness of Jehovah is, he will do it to effect. There will be something accomplished and brought to pass that will be dreadful with a witness. When the great and angry God hath risen up and executed his awful vengeance on the poor sinner, and the wretch is actually suffering the infinite weight and power of his indignation, then will God call upon the whole universe to behold that awful majesty and mighty power that is to be seen in it. . . . . .

"Thus it will be with you that are in an unconverted state, if you continue in it; the infinite might, and majesty, and terribleness of the Omnipotent God shall be magnified upon you, in the ineffable strength of your torments: you shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and when you shall be in this state of suffering, the glorious inhabitants of heaven shall go

forth and look on the awful spectacle, that they may see what the wrath and fierceness of the Almighty is; and when they have seen it, they will fall down and adore that great power and majesty." — *Works*, VII. 499 - 501.

Thus, also, according to the Westminster Assembly, the reprobate, that is, far the greater part of mankind, are ordained to sin and to suffer eternal torments, "for the glory of God's sovereign power over his creatures," and "to the praise of his glorious justice."

"The rest of mankind [with the exception of the elect] God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice." — *Westminster Assembly's Confession.* Ch. III. § 7.

No explanation is given either by the Westminster Assembly or by Edwards of the manner in which the decree of reprobation redounds to the praise of the Divine justice. Some Calvinistic writers, not contending for so much as this, have only maintained that the decree is reconcilable with any idea that we ought to form of justice as ascribed to God.

Thus Dr. Twiss, in his work before quoted, speaking of the reprobation of infants, observes: —

"These judgments of God are tremendous, I confess, but just; nor are they to be brought before the tribunal of human wisdom and justice, or examined and discussed by the rules of our reason and equity. Especially as it is lawful for God the Creator to treat a creature, however innocent (*quantumvis immerentem*), in whatever manner he pleases, whether it seem good to God to annihilate him, or to inflict upon him any torture whatever." — Lib. III. p. 21.

In his second book he has a digression to prove that "God may afflict or torment an innocent creature at pleasure": — *Probatur posse Deum creaturam immerentem affligere, seu pro libito cruciare.* In maintaining this proposition, he affirms that

"There is no such thing in God as justice, properly so called, in respect to his creatures, that is to say, by which he is bound in respect to them."

"I acknowledge," he says, "no other justice in God, than that by which he wisely orders all things to effect his own purposes." — Lib. II. pp. 15, 16.

The same doctrine was maintained by the learned Theophilus Gale, the author of a book once famous, "The Court of the Gentiles," in which he says: —

"So great is the Majestie of God, and so Absolute his Dominion, as that he is obnoxious to no Laws, Obligations, or Ties from his Creature: this Absolute Justice or Dominion regards not any qualities or conditions of its object; but God can by virtue hereof inflict the highest torments on his

innocent creature, and exempt from punishment the most nocent. By this Absolute Justice and Dominion God can inflict the greatest torments, even of Hel it self, on the most innocent creature." — Part IV. p. 367.

The unspeakable misery which the justice of God may inflict on the most innocent creature, and which he is supposed to inflict on those who have never offended against him except through an inevitable necessity imposed by himself, consists, as we have seen, according to the Westminster Assembly, in "most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in hell-fire for ever." On this subject the imagination of Edwards runs riot. In his Sermon entitled "Men naturally God's Enemies," is the following address, — utterly illogical, as men can do nothing to help themselves, and one which, if it were not clear that the writer had obstinately shut his eyes to this fundamental article of his faith, would be savagely insulting.

"If you continue God's enemy until death, you will always be his enemy. And after death your enmity will have no restraint, but it will break out, and rage without control. When you come to be a firebrand of hell, you will be a firebrand in two respects; viz. as you will be all on fire, full of the fire of God's wrath: and also as you will be all on a blaze with spite and malice towards God. You will be as

full of the fire of malice, as you will with the fire of Divine vengeance; and both will make you full of torment. Then you will appear as you are, a viper indeed. You are now a viper, but under great disguise; a wolf in sheep's clothing; but then your mask will be pulled off; you shall lose your garments and walk naked. Rev. xvi. 15. Then will you as a serpent spit poison at God, and vent your rage and malice in fearful blasphemies. Out of that mouth, out of which, when you open it, will proceed flames, will also proceed dreadful blasphemies against God. That same tongue, to cool which you will wish for a drop of water, will be eternally employed in cursing and blaspheming God and Christ." — *Works*, VII. 198.

I will venture to quote a few more sentences, relating to the same subject, from another passage of Edwards. I quote them, however, principally for the purpose of still further showing what conceptions Calvinism teaches men to form of God. The passage referred to is in his Sermon entitled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

"The wrath of kings is very much dreaded, especially of absolute monarchs, that have the possessions and lives of their subjects wholly in their power, to be disposed of at their mere will. . . . . The subject that very much enrages an arbitrary prince is liable to suffer the most extreme torments that human art can invent, or human power can inflict. . . . . The wrath of the great King of kings is as much more terrible than theirs, as his majesty is greater. . . . .

"It is the fierceness of his wrath that you are exposed to.

We often read of the fury of God; as in Isaiah lix. 17. . . . . So we read of God's fierceness. Rev. xix. 15. There we read of 'the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.' The words are exceedingly terrible. If it had only been said, 'the wrath of God,' the words would have implied that which is infinitely dreadful: but it is not only said so, but 'the fierceness and wrath of God.' The fury of God! the fierceness of Jehovah! O, how dreadful must that be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them! But it is not only said so, but 'the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.' As though there would be a very great manifestation of his almighty power in what the fierceness of his wrath should inflict, as though omnipotence should be as it were enraged, and exerted as men were wont to exert their strength in the fierceness of their wrath. . . . . .

"How awful are those words, Isaiah lxiii. 3, which are the words of the great God. 'I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.' It is perhaps impossible to conceive of words that carry in them greater manifestations of these three things, viz. contempt, and hatred, and fierceness of indignation. If you cry to God to pity you, he will be so far from pitying you in your doleful case, or showing you the least regard or favor, that, instead of that, he will only tread you under foot: and though he will know that you cannot bear the weight of omnipotence treading upon you, yet he will not regard that, but he will crush you under his feet without mercy; he will crush out your blood, and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on his garments, so as to stain all his raiment. He will not only hate you, but he will have you in the utmost contempt; no place shall be thought fit for you, but

under his feet to be trodden down as the mire of the streets." — *Works*, VII. 497 - 499.

Such is the inconsistence often found in men's characters, that, perhaps, one would not be justified in inferring from the passages I have quoted from Edwards, that he was wholly destitute of right conceptions of God, of proper affections towards Him, and of commiseration for the sufferings of his fellow-creatures. In respect to such commiseration, however, it could not be reasonably felt, in accordance with the scheme of religion which he adopted and defended. The vast amount of misery on which he expatiates as about to be inflicted on his fellow-men was, conformably to that scheme, only a manifestation of the "infinite amiableness" of God in "his supreme regard to himself." * To look on such a manifestation with horror would be in a high degree sinful. For one of the chosen to regard it with any feeling but satisfaction, can be only the result of some remaining weakness of the natural man. It is taught by Edwards, in common with many other Calvinistic writers, that, in that holier state to which "the saints" are advancing, the sight of the tortures which he describes will be

* See before, p. 194.

a subject of self-gratulation, exalting their happiness, and giving them a new sense of God's goodness. The main purpose in the infliction of these tortures on the subjects of the decree of reprobation is represented to be, "that the name of God may be glorified in their destruction." But besides this there is another purpose, which is thus explained by Edwards: —

"The sight of hell torments will exalt the happiness of the saints for ever. It will not only make them more sensible of the greatness and freeness of the grace of God in their happiness; but it will really make their happiness the greater, as it will make them more sensible of their own happiness; it will give them a more lively relish of it; it will make them prize it more. When they see others, who were of the same nature, and born under the same circumstances, plunged in such misery, and they so distinguished, O, it will make them sensible how happy they are. A sense of the opposite misery, in all cases, greatly increases the relish of any joy or pleasure." — *Sermon on the Eternity of Hell Torments.* Works, VII. 415.

To finish the exposition proposed of the doctrines of Calvinism, it only remains to show that it teaches "that the number of those saved out of the common ruin of mankind is comparatively small."

So Calvin says: —

"Indeed it is not wonderful, that they who are born in darkness harden themselves more and more in their stupid-

ity, because very few (*paucissimi*), that they may restrain themselves within bounds, attend with docility to the word of God; but they rather exult in their own vanity." — *Institut.* Lib. I. c. 6. § 2.

In commenting upon the words in the prayer of our Saviour, John xvii. 9, he says: —

"Hence it appears that the whole world does not belong to its Creator; only that grace snatches from the curse and wrath of God and from eternal death a few, who would otherwise perish; but leaves the world in the ruin to which it has been ordained." *

In commenting on the invitation of our Lord, "Come to me all ye that are weary and heavy laden," he remarks: —

"All [who accept this invitation] are few in number; because, out of the innumerable multitude of those who are perishing, but few perceive that they are perishing." — *Comment. in Harm. Evang.* Opp. VI. 131.

In the Westminster Assembly's Larger Catechism we are told: —

"They who, having never heard the gospel, know not Jesus Christ, and believe not in him, cannot be saved; be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light

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* The words of this extraordinary passage deserve to be given in the original: — "Unde fit ut totus mundus ad suum creatorem non pertineat; nisi quod a maledictione et irâ Dei, ac morte æternâ non multos eripit gratia, qui alioqui perituri erant; mundum autem in suo interitu, cui destinatus est, relinquit." — *Institut.* Lib. III. c. 22. § 7.

of nature, or the law of that religion which they profess; neither is there salvation in any other, but in Christ alone, who is the Saviour only of his body, the Church."

"The visible Church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children." But

"All that hear the gospel and live in the visible Church are not saved." — *Anss.* 60 – 62.

It is evident that according to the Westminster Assembly the number of the reprobate far exceeds that of the elect.

The following is from Edwards: —

"That there are generally but few good men in the world, even among them that have those most distinguishing and glorious advantages for it which they are favored with that live under the gospel, is evident by that saying of our Lord, from time to time in his mouth, *Many are called, but few are chosen.* And if there are but few among these, how few, how very few indeed, must persons of this character be, compared with the whole world of mankind? The exceeding smallness of the number of true saints, compared with the whole world, appears by the representations often made of them as distinguished from the world." — *On Original Sin.* Works, VI. 190.

"If," he says, "we observe the history of the Old Testament, there is reason to think there never was any time, from Joshua to the Captivity, wherein wickedness was more restrained, and virtue and religion more encouraged and promoted, than in David's and Solomon's times. And if there was so little true piety in that nation that was the only people of God under heaven, even in their very best times,

what may we suppose concerning the world in general, take one time with another ? " — *Ibid.* p. 192.

As I have mentioned in the Introductory Note, what precedes comprises the substance of an article formerly published. My primary purpose in that article being to vindicate myself from the charge of misrepresenting the doctrines of Calvinism, I did not add to it any general remarks on the view given of those doctrines. But such an exhibition suggests many thoughts, to which it may be worth while to attend. It is not to be turned away from, as something too revolting to be steadily contemplated, or with any indistinct incredulity concerning the fact that such doctrines have been believed. It is to be regarded more calmly, as a great lesson in the study of human nature, — a melancholy lesson certainly, but one full of instruction.

We must, in the first place, distinctly recognize the truth, that what is essential in the system has been *believed*, in the proper sense of the term, and very extensively believed. It is not with these as with some other doctrines of false religion, which those who profess them deceive themselves in thinking that they be-

lieve. I refer to doctrines which predicate of the same subject conceptions contradictory to each other, so that it is as impossible for any mind, understanding the meaning of the words, to receive them as true, as it would be to believe the proposition, that a certain object is a triangle whose three angles form only one angle, or that a block of wood may be converted into a mass of gold without any change of its sensible properties. The doctrines we have been attending to involve, in their essential character, no such obvious verbal absurdity. It is not an absurdity in terms, to affirm that God (meaning the Supreme Ruler of All Things) is a malignant being, and that he forms many of his creatures with such natures as necessarily cause their eternal misery. When, indeed, it is affirmed that his justice requires or admits the infliction on men, of punishment for sins which he has laid them under an irresistible necessity of committing, the proposition is a verbal absurdity, which can be veiled only by asserting, that the human mind is incapable of forming a right conception of the nature of absolute or perfect justice, and that the word "justice" is used in some unknown sense. But such propositions are not essential to the system. Without reference to them, the acts as-

cribed to God, and the supposed nature and destiny of man, are stated in language perfectly intelligible.

It appears, therefore, that there is nothing so repulsive to reason, or so revolting to our moral feelings, that it may not be received as a doctrine of Christianity. If we look abroad, beyond the confines of Christianity, to the past history and present state of the world, we shall find that it is on the subject of religion that the most portentous and pernicious errors have prevailed, — errors of superstition and errors of virtual atheism, — on the one hand, conceptions of the spiritual world disastrously false, and, on the other, an abnegation of all but what is present and material.

The opinions of men accustomed to think for themselves, especially their opinions on subjects of the highest interest, are professedly founded on reason, or, at least, claim to be in accordance with reason. It would be admitting a self-contradictory proposition, for any one to admit his belief to be unreasonable. But notwithstanding the presumption thus created, that reason has had much to do in the formation of men's religious opinions, yet we know that such an inference would be false. When men are spoken of, and we discourse of human nature, we

are apt to direct our thoughts to some particular, small class of men, perhaps the most intelligent of those with whom we are acquainted; or to form some abstract notion of the capacities of human nature, and to imagine those capacities as being actually exercised as they should be. But we ought to extend our view to the human race, and to consider what men really are, and what they have been.

If we divide those now living out of the limits of Christendom into classes with reference to their ostensible or nominal opinions respecting the greatest and most important subject of thought, religion, we find that the largest of the several divisions thus made consists of the professed disciples of some form or other of Buddhism, a religion of the history and character of which very little is known in the Western world beyond a small circle of the learned; while, from what is known, it may fairly be inferred that it is little comprehended in any of its forms by the generality of its professors. Then come, as the next class, the Hindus, with their monstrous mythology and all-pervading superstitions. The division next in size consists of the followers of Mahomet. We may then notice the disciples of Confucius, whose nearest approach toward recognizing the

connection between the inhabitants of this earth and the spiritual Universe consists in the rites performed at the tombs of their ancestors. And finally we may turn to a great miscellaneous multitude of various superstitions and idolatries, into which any proper religious belief or sentiment rarely enters as an element. These classes constitute a great majority of mankind.

Among them we cannot look for a religious faith resting on reason. The opinions of the majority of mankind on the most important of subjects are not the result of investigation and thought and intelligent conviction. Nor have they been in any other way, by any natural instinct or perception, guided to the truth. Their errors and superstitions, however they originated, are now received because they are traditionary. The belief of them has been incorporated with their minds at that period when whatever is taught is received as true, and has been strengthened by all surrounding circumstances in after life. It has not even occurred to one in many thousands to subject them to the test of reason; and the doubts of a very few thinkers among nations not Christianized have, with very rare exceptions, such as that of the eminent Hindu reformer of our own day, led to nothing but unbelief, or, as in the

case of the Mahometan Sufis, to vague, unintelligible mysticism.

If rational religion — correct views of God and his providence, of man and his destiny — is to be found anywhere, it is in the Christian world. To this, then, we turn; and we perceive at once, that Christians are divided into distinct parties, and that, if any one of these parties holds a rational faith, the faith of most other Christians must be very erroneous. By far the greater part of those numbered as Christians is composed of the professed or nominal members either of the Romish or of the Greek Church, — the Greek being allied to the Romish in all that is essential except in acknowledging the supremacy of the Pope. Intelligent Protestants regard the doctrines of either Church as a mass of gross errors, accumulated and consolidated during centuries of ignorance and superstition. But where there is any doubt or controversy, men must be addressed as rational beings; and neither the Romish nor the Greek Church, therefore, refuses to acknowledge the existence and jurisdiction of reason. But the appeal made to her by them is for an act of self-immolation, — to sacrifice herself to the authority of the Church. Reason is called upon to acknowledge, that, as

regards all which is further to be done or believed, her decisions are of no value. What appears to her a pernicious error, a folly, or an absurdity, may be a sublime and momentous truth. Having made the submission required, her office ceases. She passes out of her province, and becomes guilty of impiety, if she meddles further with doctrines which she ought humbly to receive. She must at once admit as true all that is taught by the Church, that is, by the priesthood.

If, then, such a religion as reason can assent to, exist among men, if there be anywhere a correct conception of those truths which God taught us by his revelation of himself through Christ, if there be anywhere a system which, containing the profession of those truths, does not contradict and neutralize them by incorporating with this profession the inculcation of opposite errors, it would seem that this system is to be sought for among the comparatively small body of Protestants. In vindicating their dissent they were compelled to appeal to reason. But the scheme of doctrines originally maintained by a great majority of those who, during the time of the Reformation, separated from the Church of Rome, has just been presented to view. This scheme in its original

form, or not essentially modified, though sometimes a little disguised (as in the Articles of the Church of England), is still the professed faith of the majority of Protestants, — professed in their creeds, whatever may be their real belief or unbelief. Most Protestant churches and sects likewise claim virtually the same control over reason as the Romish Church. Our carnal reason, as it is called, must abase itself before the incomprehensible mysteries of their faith. Men should follow the directions that were given to the late Dr. Arnold when his understanding was struggling with the doctrines to which his assent was required, — "to pause in his inquiries," and "to put down objections by main force whenever they arose in his mind." * Such directions do not furnish a stable foundation for a firm and rational faith, though they do furnish a sufficient foundation for bigoted ignorance.

But furthermore, it is expressly contended by a large portion of Protestants, and by others who desire to be considered as believers in the divine authority of Christ, that Christian faith is not founded on reason. It is, according to Calvin, a special gift of God, granted only to

* Life of Dr. Arnold, 4th Ed. Vol. I. pp. 21, 22.

the regenerate. "There are manifest signs," he says, "that God speaks in the Scriptures, from which it appears that their doctrine is from Heaven"; but these signs are not to be discerned by the unregenerate; "his word will not find faith in the hearts of men before it is sealed by the inward witness of the Spirit." "They act preposterously who endeavor to establish a firm faith in Scripture by *disputing*." * "Profane men, that they may not believe any thing foolishly or lightly, desire and demand that it should be proved to them by reason, that Moses and the Prophets spoke by divine inspiration. But I answer, that the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason." †

In commenting on the often perverted words of St. Paul, which are rendered in the Common Version, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned," ‡ Cal-

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* *Disputando.* The word is italicized in the original, from which I think it must be inferred that Calvin meant to use it in an invidious, associated sense, which is uncommon, to say the least, in good Latin. If he did not, it should be rendered "by arguing," or "by argument."

† Institut. Lib. I. c. 7. § 4. ‡ 1 Corinthians ii. 14.

vin says: — "The Apostle teaches that the Gospel is contemned because it is unknown; and that it is unknown because it is too hidden and sublime to be apprehended by the human mind, — such wisdom as so far surpasses the whole intelligence of man that he cannot get even a taste of it. For though Paul here tacitly accuses the pride of the flesh, in that men dare to condemn as foolish what they do not understand, he at the same time shows how great is the weakness, or rather stupidity, of the human mind, in denying it to be capable of spiritual intelligence. For he teaches, that it is not merely through the perversity of the human will, that man, considered as man (*homo ipse*), does not attain to the things of the Spirit, but also through the impotence of his understanding. If he had said, men *will* not to be wise, that indeed would have been true, but he adds that they indeed *cannot* be. Whence we infer that faith is not in every man's power, but is the gift of God. . . . . In judging of the doctrine of the Gospel, men's minds are of necessity blind till they are enlightened by the Spirit of God."

The same doctrine is maintained by followers of Calvin at the present day, but commonly, I suppose, with some softening or suppression in

the mode of stating it, for the sake of accommodating it to the existing condition of men's minds. It is said, that "the evidence of religious truth is the truth itself. It is believed for its own sake. It is seen and felt to be true. Faith is no work of reason, and therefore cannot be overthrown by it, since believing no more arises from argument than seeing or tasting. But the great majority of men have no such perception of the peculiar truths of the Gospel. The natural man cannot discern the things of the Spirit. The spiritual man discerns their excellence, and receives them because he does discern them. The doctrines of Christ crucified [as an atonement for the sins of men], of the corruption of man [of man's nature], of the necessity of regeneration by the power of the Holy Ghost [of a new nature given by God instead of the nature with which he formed us], and of eternal retribution [of that eternal misery to which man is justly liable for what he is by nature], do not commend themselves to the hearts of unrenewed men." Undoubtedly they do not. One may at first thought be disposed to assent unreservedly to the proposition, that a man's nature must be supernaturally changed before the doctrines of Calvinism can commend themselves to his

heart or his moral sentiments. But some knowledge of what has been and what is the state of opinion in the world, and the exercise of Christian charity, may satisfy us that men, even in an unregenerate state, continuing as God made them, without having experienced any great moral change, natural or supernatural, are capable of receiving those doctrines. There is no difficulty, however, in assenting to the proposition, that their belief no more arises from argument than seeing or tasting.

In the passage marked as quoted I have adopted the language of a very respectable writer, who, from his character and position, may be considered as a representative of the larger number of Presbyterians in this country.*

Other professed Calvinists of the present day express themselves differently. The statutes of the most important and most learned of the orthodox Schools of Theology in New England require that its Professors should be "orthodox and consistent Calvinists," and enforce the requisition by demanding their assent — an assent to be repeated every five years — to an elaborate creed, which, if it vary from orthodox

* See an article in the number of the "Princeton Review" for January, 1840, p. 33, seqq.

Calvinism, does so only by inclining to what have been, perhaps erroneously, regarded by some as the balder and more offensive doctrines of Hopkins, an heresiarch probably but little known out of this country. But it is one of the saddest indications of the religious state of our times, in this country, in England, and elsewhere, that the solemn profession of assent to an orthodox creed has but little binding force on the minds of those who make it, and indicates little of their real belief. The writer to whom I have just referred quotes with strong disapprobation from a distinguished Professor of that School the following doctrine: — "The truths of Christianity have always been addressed to the intuitive perceptions of the common mind." "The majority of cordial believers in the Bible know the Bible to be true, because they feel it to be so. Their faith results from the accordance of their higher nature with the spirit of the Bible." If by this "higher nature" be meant, as the Calvinistic doctrine requires, the new nature given to the elect, the term is unsuitable and deceptive. If it be used to denote something in man previous to the change of nature which Calvinism insists on as necessary to salvation, — something equivalent to "the intuitive perceptions of the

common mind," — the position is fundamentally opposite to Calvinism, and is, at the same time, one which either a Calvinist or an anti-Calvinist must at once reject as untrue. There is nothing, the Calvinist maintains, in the natural man in accordance with the things of the Spirit; and there is nothing, a mere philosopher will maintain, in the natural sentiments of man in accordance with the doctrines of Calvinism.

It may be a groundless conjecture, but the language last quoted seems to have been borrowed, perhaps inadvertently, from a class of theologians, who have been commonly known among us under the name of "Transcendentalists," with whom the followers of Calvin have little in common, except the rejection of reason as the foundation of religious belief. But even in this respect there is a wide distinction between them, which, in the case supposed, must have been overlooked by the author of the passages last quoted. The doctrines of one of the parties we know, for they have been presented with no essential difference of statement in a great body of creeds and other writings; the doctrines of the other party, what they consider as constituting Christianity, we do not know with any precision, for there has been no agree-

ment among the different members of the party in their exposition of them, nor, I suspect, has even the positive belief of any one member of it been clearly stated. But whatever conceptions we may form of their belief, it will not be denied that for the most part it is something very dissimilar and adverse to Calvinism. What one party intuitively discerns to be true, the other party intuitively discerns to be false. Nor is this strange; for the nature of their intuition is as different as its results. One party regards it as a supernatural gift of God to, comparatively, a small number, and denies the capacity of thus discerning religious truth to the generality of men in their natural state. The other contends that it is a gift of nature to all men. From this last position it would seem to follow that the vast amount of gross errors concerning religion, which have inundated Christendom and the world, is the result, solely, of the perversity of the human will. But we are debarred from this conclusion by the absurdity of making intuition subject to the will, — by its involving the supposition, that we may will not to see what we do see; that a man, for example, may will, if he pleases, to believe that the three angles of an equilateral triangle are not equal.

The concert of different Christian sects, otherwise much at variance with each other, for the purpose of depriving reason of her proper office in the highest department of thought, and the doctrines which in connection with it have been set up in opposition to reason, have produced their natural effects in alienating men from our religion. Irrational credulity has for its regular counterpart irrational incredulity. The most striking characteristics of the greater part of the writers of our day on the subject of religion are, on the one side, the inculcation of doctrines which the human intellect has outgrown, and, on the other side, the absence of any rational religious faith, tending to and often ending in atheism. I do not mean by atheism the denial of any power, operating according to certain physical laws which regulate the Universe, and producing motion and life, — for this denial, though it has been virtually made or closely approached by some modern speculatists, is a mere absurdity, to be maintained by no one who has not quite lost sight of his reason and abandoned his common sense in the mazes of metaphysics, — but the denial of all intelligent action or benevolent purpose in the operations of that power, the denial of God in the sense of a being possessed of moral and intellectual attributes.

Such being the state of things, are we to conclude that religious truth is unattainable; or that, if it be attainable by a few individuals, there are no means of procuring its general reception? Or shall we believe that the world is now going on very well without it; and that to ourselves individually it is a matter of little concern whether our characters are formed, and our conduct controlled, by true religious principles, or not? Are we to conclude, that it is the part of a wise man to turn away his eyes from the moral and religious ignorance, the debasement and annihilation of intellect, which exist in the Christian world? Should we look with philosophical indifference on the vices and selfishness which spread through all classes of society, on the physical and moral wretchedness of the poor and the crimes which it generates, on oppression and tyranny, and the maddening passions which they are exasperating? Should we regard these things as the necessary condition of humanity? Or should we expect any great improvement only through violent changes of the forms of human government, in the pulling to pieces and reconstruction of human society? — its reconstruction with the same materials that now exist, greatly damaged in the

work of demolition? Certainly we are to come to no such conclusions.

The state of the world would be very different from what it is, if Christianity were really the religion of those who are numbered as Christians. Every essential improvement in the condition of men is to be hoped for only from the operation of Christian truth; — not from errors contrary to Christian truth and usurping its place. Such errors may in individual minds have become so blended with important truths and holy affections, that it is difficult to effect their separation; they may be so controlled in their operation by those truths and affections as to become harmless; or they may even have entered into such combinations that their partial operation is for good; — as the stern courage, the unyielding endurance, and the other harsh virtues of our Puritan ancestors, derived strength from their faith that they were a peculiar people, the elect of God. But religious errors considered in their direct and uncontrolled operation are simply pernicious. Their product is only evil. They can form no barrier against that flood of irreligion and crime which threatens to overspread a great part of Europe, and which has made its way into our own country. It is only through the

inseparable mixture of Christian truth which enters into every system of false religion professed by Christians that any good has been wrought. But the deluge that impends, should it not be stayed, will sweep away, not those systems of false religion alone, but all those Christian principles and sentiments which have been connected with them, and leave only shapeless piles of ruin behind.

To make Christianity the religion of Christendom, we must pursue a course directly opposite to that which, as we have seen, has been adopted by most Christian sects. The authority of reason, instead of being disparaged and rejected, must be fully acknowledged and appealed to, on this, the most important subject that falls within her jurisdiction. Men must be called upon to submit to her decisions; to believe and feel and do what their reason requires that they should believe and feel and do, and nothing beside. We must vindicate the authority of reason before we can hope to vindicate the authority of religion. Make men rational and you make them religious; for true religion is in perfect accordance with reason. Let it not be said that we are assured of the highest truths of religion, of God's care for men, and of man's immortality, only by revela-

tion. This is true. But we are assured that such a revelation has been made only by reason. Christian faith is a rational faith. It has been exposed to such disastrous attacks, it has failed so much of producing its proper effect, because it has commonly been presented to men as an irrational faith; because its professors, instead of appealing to reason, have endeavored to withdraw it from her jurisdiction.

At the very outset, then, the rational believer parts company with the great majority of professed Christians, and pursues an opposite course. The fundamental error which has been committed of dissociating reason from religious faith has been the vital principle, the necessary condition, of all the other errors which have so changed the aspect of Christianity. In the absence of reason as a guide, there is no mistake into which men may not fall. The proposition may seem too simple and indisputable to be thus formally stated. But the most simple and indisputable truths are often the most important; and when they are disregarded or contemned, it becomes necessary to state them in their bare distinctness. Reason is the most sacred gift of God to man, the faculty by which we become accountable beings; it is its right-

ful office to determine our belief and to regulate our conduct. To withdraw ourselves from its control, to regard its exercise as unholy, to trust to any other guide that may be substituted in its place, is to withdraw ourselves from the guidance of God.

Reason and Truth are the only hope of mankind. It is through them alone that any essential improvement in the condition of men — of individuals and of nations — is to be wrought out. Weak instruments they may be, often overborne and silenced by the discordant clamor of men's passions and prejudices and folly, by selfishness and sin; — but there are no other. It is by reason that truth is discovered, and through reason that it is addressed to our hearts. By what other influence should they be controlled? By what other influence should our permanent affections be formed? Certainly neither by false doctrines, nor by unsubstantial imaginations, nor by the blind, disorderly working of natural impulses good and bad. Intellectual truth is the essential constituent of moral goodness. Whoever acts virtuously, whoever acts with the purpose of serving his fellow-men, does so from a recognition, in thought or feeling, of the truth of his obligations to his fellow-men; and any strong sense

of these obligations rests ultimately upon his recognizing his and their relations to God through a common nature as immortal beings. When we regard ourselves and our fellow-men as mere accidents of this earth, born to perish, our affections for them, our desire to serve them, must be of the same kind as those we may have toward the domestic animals about us, between whom and them we have effaced in our minds any essential distinction. To those who may think and feel thus, the happiness of mankind is not to be intrusted. Through the sense of personal suffering and wrong, through vindictive passions, or bitterness of temper, or the mere love of notoriety, the source of no good but of many bad actions, or from the desire to secure the power of oppression in their own hands and profit by it, men whose characters afford no ground for confidence may be ready to fight or to rail against the established abuses that are preying on the happiness of man. But from such men nothing is to be looked for but the substitution, through wasting and demoralizing violence, of a new class of evils for those that now exist.

The sole remedy against this flux and reflux of evils is to be found in the power of religion, — in Christianity, not such as it has often been

represented to be, but such as it is; in informing men of all classes with its spirit and its truths. It was through this channel alone, through the Truth, that the blessings of God communicated by the great Benefactor of our race were to be conveyed to mankind. On the last day of his life, that day of agony and triumph, he pronounced the declaration, — "I was born for this end, and for this end have I come to the world, to bear testimony to the Truth." He came to bear testimony to that truth, religious truth, which underlies all other moral truth, and which alone concerns man in his permanent relations, his relations to God and eternity. It was for the establishment of that truth that God manifested himself through Christ. It was by the name of "the Truth" that our Lord designated his religion, thus identifying it with all that it most concerns us to believe.

"I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life," — that is, Eternal Life. So he prayed for his immediate disciples, "Father, sanctify them through the Truth; thy doctrine is Truth." So he promised them, "The spirit of the Truth," the spirit from God that accompanies the reception of my religion, "will guide you to all the Truth," to all the essential truth,

which constitutes it. Thus he told them, "If you remain steadfast in what I teach, you will know the Truth; and the Truth will make you free." They were expecting that the Messiah would deliver their nation from subjection to the Romans. But it was another sort of freedom that he promised them through the knowledge of the Truth.

A

DISCOURSE

ON THE

LATEST FORM OF INFIDELITY,

DELIVERED AT THE REQUEST OF THE

"ASSOCIATION OF THE ALUMNI OF THE CAMBRIDGE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL,"

ON THE 19TH OF JULY, 1839.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

In the year 1830, I resigned (in consequence of ill health) my office of Professor of Sacred Literature in the University in Cambridge. In 1839 the gentlemen who had been educated in the Theological School formed themselves into a society, and at their request I delivered the following address on the occasion of their first public meeting.

DISCOURSE.

I ADDRESS you, Gentlemen, and our friends who are assembled with us, on an occasion of more than common interest; as it is your first meeting since joining together in a society as former pupils of the Theological School in this place. Many of you may look back over a considerable portion of time that has elapsed since your residence here. In thus meeting with those in whose society we have spent some of the earlier years of life, recollections are naturally called up of pleasures that are gone, of ties that have been broken, of hopes that have perished, and of bright imaginations that have faded away. Such recollections produce those serious views of our present existence with which religious sentiment is connected. They make us feel the value of a Christian's faith; of that faith, which, where decay was before

written on all most dear to us, stamps immortality instead.

I see among you many, who, I know, will recall our former connection with the same interest as I do, and whom I am privileged to regard as friends. As for those of you, Gentlemen, to whom I have not stood in the relation of an instructor, we also have an intimate connection with each other. Your office is to defend, explain, and enforce the truths of Christianity; and with the importance of those truths no one can be more deeply impressed than myself. So far as you are faithful to your duty, the strong sympathy of all good men is with you.

But we meet in a revolutionary and uncertain state of religious opinion, existing throughout what is called the Christian world. Our religion is very imperfectly understood, and received by comparatively a small number with intelligent faith. In proportion as our view is more extended, and we are better acquainted with what is and what has been, we shall become more sensible of the great changes that have long been in preparation, but which of late have been rapidly developed. The present state of things imposes new responsibilities upon all who know the value of our faith and

have ability to maintain it. Let us then employ this occasion in considering some of the characteristics of the times, and some of those opinions now prevalent, which are at war with a belief in Christianity.

By a belief in Christianity, we mean the belief that Christianity is a revelation by God of the truths of religion; and that the divine authority of him whom God commissioned to speak to us in his name was attested, in the only mode in which it could be, by miraculous displays of his power. Religious truths are those truths, and those alone, which concern the relations of man to God and eternity. It is only as an immortal being and a creature of God, that man is capable of religion. Now those truths which concern our higher nature, and all that can with reason deeply interest us in our existence, we Christians receive, as we trust, on the testimony of God. He who rejects Christianity must admit them, if he admit them at all, upon some other evidence.

But the fundamental truths of religion taught by Christianity became very early connected with human speculations, to which the same importance was gradually attached, and for the proof of which the same divine authority was claimed. These speculations spread out and

consolidated into systems of theology, presenting aspects equally hostile to reason and to our faith; so hostile, that, for many centuries, a true Christian in belief and heart, earnest to communicate to others the blessings of his faith, would have experienced, anywhere in Christendom, a fate similar to that which his Master suffered among the Jews. It would be taking a different subject from what I have proposed, to attempt to explain and trace the causes of this monstrous phenomenon. The false representations of Christianity, that have come down to us from less enlightened times, have ceased to retain their power over far the larger portion of those individuals who form, for good or evil, the character of the age in which they live. But the reaction of the human intellect and heart against their imposition has as yet had but little tendency to procure the reception of more correct notions of Christianity. On the contrary, the inveterate and enormous errors that have prevailed have so perverted men's conceptions, have so obscured and perplexed the whole subject, have so stood in the way of all correct knowledge of facts, and all just reasoning; there are so few works in Christian theology not at least colored and tainted by them; and they still present such obstacles at

every step to a rational investigation of the truth; that the degree of learning, reflection, judgment, freedom from worldly influences, and independence of thought, necessary to ascertain for one's self the true character of Christianity, is to be expected from but few. The greater number, consequently, confound the systems that have been substituted for it with Christianity itself, and receive them in its stead, or, in rejecting them, reject our faith. The tendency of the age is to the latter result.

This tendency is strengthened by the political action of the times, especially in the Old World. Ancient institutions and traditionary power are there struggling to maintain themselves against the vast amount of new energy that has been brought into action. Long-existing forms of society are giving way. The old prejudices by which they were propped up are decaying. Wise men look with awe at the spectacle; as if they saw in some vast tower, hanging over a populous city, rents opening, and its sides crumbling and inclining. But in the contest between the new and the old, which has spread over Europe, erroneous representations of Christianity are in alliance with established power. They have long been so. The institutions connected with them have long

been principal sources of rank and emolument. What passes for Christianity is thus placed in opposition to the demands of the mass of men, and is regarded by them as inimical to their rights; while, on the other hand, those to whom false Christianity affords aid repel all examination into the genuineness of its claims.

The commotion of men's minds in the rest of the civilized world produces a sympathetic action in our own country. We have indeed but little to guard us against the influence of the depraving literature and noxious speculations which flow in among us from Europe. We have not yet any considerable body of intellectual men, devoted to the higher departments of thought, and capable of informing and guiding others in attaining the truth. There is no controlling power of intellect among us.

Christianity, then, has been grossly misrepresented, is very imperfectly understood, and powerful causes are in operation to obstruct all correct knowledge of it, and to withdraw men's thoughts and affections from it. But at the present day there is little of that avowed and zealous infidelity, the infidelity of highly popular authors, acknowledged enemies of our faith, which characterized the latter half of the last century. Their writings, often disfigured by

gross immoralities, are now falling into disrepute. But the effects of those writings, and of the deeply seated causes by which they were produced, are still widely diffused. There is now no bitter warfare against Christianity, because such men as then waged it would now consider our religion as but a name, a pretence, the obsolete religion of the state, the superstition of the vulgar. But infidelity has but assumed another form, and in Europe, and especially in Germany, has made its way among a very large portion of nominally Christian theologians. Among them are now to be found those whose writings are most hostile to all that characterizes our faith. Christianity is undermined by them with the pretence of settling its foundations anew. Phantoms are substituted for the realities of revelation.

It is asserted, apparently on good authority, that the celebrated atheist Spinoza composed the work in which his opinions are most fully unfolded, in the Dutch language, and committed it to his friend, the physician Meyer, to translate into Latin; that, where the name *God* now appears, Spinoza had written *Nature;* but that Meyer induced him to substitute the former word for the latter, in order partially to screen himself from the odium to which he

might be exposed.* Whether this anecdote be true or not, a similar abuse of language appears in many of the works to which I refer. The holiest names are there; a superficial or ignorant reader may be imposed upon by their occurrence; but they are there as words of show, devoid of their essential meaning, and perverted to express some formless and powerless conception. In Germany the theology of which I speak has allied itself with atheism, with pantheism, and with the other irreligious speculations that have appeared in those metaphysical systems from which the God of Christianity is excluded.

There is no subject of historical inquiry of more interest than the history of opinions; there is none of more immediate concern than the state of opinions; for opinions govern the

* See Le Clerc's "Bibliothèque Ancienne et Moderne," Tom. XV. p. 433; Tom. XXII. p. 135. This account, which Le Clerc says was given him in writing by a man worthy of credit, is confirmed not merely by the whole tenor of Spinoza's system, but by his use of the words "God" and "nature" as interchangeable. Thus he says in the Preface to the fourth Part of his Ethics, — "We have shown in the Appendix to the first Part, that Nature does not act for any end. For that eternal and infinite being, which we call God or Nature, acts by the same necessity by which it exists. The reason, therefore, or cause why God or Nature acts, and why it exists, is one and the same. As it exists for no end, so it acts for no end."

world. Except in cases of strong temptation, men's evil passions must coincide with or must pervert their opinions, before they can obtain the mastery. It is, therefore, not a light question, what men think of Christianity. It is a question on which, in the judgment of an intelligent believer, the condition of the civilized world depends. With these views we will consider the aspect that infidelity has taken in our times.

The latest form of infidelity is distinguished by assuming the Christian name, while it strikes directly at the root of faith in Christianity, and indirectly of all religion, by denying the miracles attesting the divine mission of Christ. The first writer, so far as I know, who maintained the impossibility of a miracle was Spinoza, whose argument, disengaged from the use of language foreign from his opinions, is simply this, that the laws of nature are the laws by which God is bound, Nature and God being the same, and therefore laws from which Nature or God can never depart.* The argument is founded on atheism. The denial of the possibility of miracles must involve the denial of the existence of God; since, if there be a

* See his "Tractatus Theologico-Politicus," particularly Cap. VI.

God, in the proper sense of the word, there can be no room for doubt that he may act in a manner different from that in which he displays his power in the ordinary operations of nature. It deserves notice, however, that in Spinoza's discussion of this subject we find that affectation of religious language, and of religious reverence and concern, which is so striking a characteristic of many of the irreligious speculations of our day, and of which he, perhaps, furnished the prototype; for he has been regarded as a profound teacher, a patriarch of truth, by some of the most noted among the infidel philosophers and theologians of Germany. "I will show from Scripture," he says, "that the decrees and commands of God, and consequently his providence, are nothing but the order of nature. . . . . If any thing should take place in nature which does not follow from its laws, *that* would necessarily be repugnant to the order which God has established in nature by its universal laws, and, therefore, contrary to nature and its laws; and consequently the belief of such an event would cause universal doubt, and lead to atheism."* So strong a hold has religion upon the inmost nature of

* Ibid., Cap. VI.

man, that even its enemies, in order to delude their followers, thus assume its aspect and mock its tones.

What has been stated is the great argument of Spinoza, to which every thing in his discussion of the subject refers; but this discussion may appear like the text-book of much that has been written in modern times concerning it. There is one, however, among the writings against the miracles of Christianity, of a different kind, the famous Essay of Hume. None has drawn more attention, or has more served as a groundwork for infidelity. Yet, considering the sagacity of the author, and the celebrity of his work, it is remarkable, that, in his main argument, the whole point to be proved is broadly assumed in the premises. "It is a miracle," he says, "that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event; otherwise the event would not merit that appellation." The conclusion, if conclusion it may be called, is easily made. If a miracle has never been observed in any age or country, if uniform experience shows that no miracle ever occurred, then it follows that all accounts of past miracles are undeserving of

credit. But if there be an attempt to stretch this easy conclusion, and to represent it as involving the intrinsic incredibility of a miracle, the argument immediately gives way. "Experience," says Hume, "is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact." Experience is the foundation of such reasoning, but we may draw inferences from our experience. We may conclude from it the existence of a power capable of works which we have never known it to perform; and no one, it may be presumed, who believes that there is a God, will say, that he is convinced by his experience, that God can manifest his power only in conformity to the laws which he has imposed upon nature.

Hume cannot be charged with affecting religion; but in the conclusion of his Essay, he says, in mockery, "I am the better pleased with the method of reasoning here delivered, as I think it may serve to confound those dangerous friends, or disguised enemies, to the Christian religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion is founded on *faith*, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it, to put it to such a trial as it is by no means fitted to endure." What Hume said in derision has

been virtually repeated, apparently in earnest, by some of the modern disbelievers of miracles, who still choose to profess a belief in Christianity.

To deny that a miracle is capable of proof, or to deny that it may be proved by evidence of the same nature as establishes the truth of other events, is, in effect, as I have said, to deny the existence of God. A miracle can be incapable of proof, only because it is physically or morally impossible; since what is possible may be proved. To deny that the truth of a miracle may be established, involves the denial of creation; for there can be no greater miracle than creation. It equally implies, that no species of being that propagates its kind ever had a commencement; for if there was a first plant that grew without seed, or a first man without parents, or if of any series of events there was a first without such antecedents as the laws of nature require, then there was a miracle. So far is a miracle from being incapable of proof, that you can escape from the necessity of believing innumerable miracles, only by believing that man, and all other animals, and all plants, have existed from eternity upon this earth, without commencement of propagation, there never having been a first of any species. No

one, at the present day, will maintain with Lucretius, that they were generated from inanimate matter, by the fermentation of heat and moisture. Nothing can seem more simple or conclusive than the view we have taken; but we may render it more familiar by an appeal to fact. The science of geology has shown us, that man is but a late inhabitant of the earth. The first individuals of our race, then, were not produced as all others have been. They were formed by a miracle, or, in other words, by an act of God's power, exerted in a different manner from that in which it operates according to the established laws of nature. Creation, the most conspicuous, is at the same time the most undeniable, of miracles.

By any one who admits that God exists, in the proper sense of the words, his power to effect a miracle cannot be doubted; and it would be the excess of human presumption and folly to affirm, that it would be inconsistent with his wisdom and goodness ever to exert his power except in those modes of action which he has prescribed to himself in what we call the laws of nature.

On the contrary, a religious philosopher may regard the uniformity of the manifestations of God's power in the course of nature, as solely

intended by him to afford a stable ground for calculation and action to his rational creatures; which could not exist, if the antecedents that we call causes were not, in all ordinary cases, the signs of consequent effects. This uniformity is necessary to enable created beings to be rational agents. The Deity has imposed upon himself no arbitrary and mechanical laws. It is solely, so far as we can perceive, for the sake of his creatures, that he preserves the uniformity of action that exists in his works. Beyond the sphere of their observation, where this cause ceases, we have no ground for the belief of its continuance. There is nothing to warrant the opinion, that the Deity still restrains his power by an adherence to laws, the observance of which his creatures cannot recognize. We have strong reasons for believing that such an apparently causeless uniformity of operation would produce, not good, but evil. We have no ground for supposing that the operation of the laws of nature, with which we are acquainted, extends beyond the ken of human observation; or that these laws are any thing more than a superficial manifestation of God's power, the mere exterior phenomena of the universe. We have no reason to doubt that the creation may be full of hidden miracles.

But, if the uniformity of the laws of nature, so far as they fall within our cognizance, is ordained by God for the good of his creatures, then, should a case occur in which a great blessing is to be bestowed upon them, the dispensing of which requires that he should act in other modes, no presumption would exist against his so acting. So far as we are able to discern, there would be no reason to doubt that he would so act. A miracle is improbable, when we can perceive no sufficient cause in reference to his creatures, why the Deity should vary his modes of operation; it ceases to be so, when such a cause is assigned. But Christianity claims to reveal facts, a knowledge of which is essential to the moral and spiritual regeneration of men; and to offer, in attestation of the truth of those facts, the only satisfactory proof, the authority of God, evidenced by miraculous displays of his power. The supposed interposition of God corresponds to the weighty purpose which it is represented as effecting. If Christianity profess to teach truths of infinite moment; if we perceive, that such is the character of its teachings; if, indeed, they are true; and if we are satisfied, from the exercise of our own reason and the history of the world, that they relate to facts concerning our relations

and destiny, of which we could otherwise obtain no assurance, then this character of our religion removes all presumption against its claims to a miraculous origin.

But incredulity respecting the miracles of Christianity rarely has its source in any process of reasoning. It is commonly produced by the gross misrepresentations which have been made of Christianity. It has also another cause, deeply seated in our nature; — the inaptitude and reluctance of men to extend their view beyond the present and sensible, to raise themselves above the interests, the vexations, the pleasures, innocent or criminal, that lie within the horizon of a year or a week; and to open their minds to those thoughts and feelings that rush in with the clear apprehension of the fact, that the barrier between the eternal and the finite world has been thrown open. A religious horror may come over us, so that

> "We fain would skulk beneath our wonted covering,
> Mean as it is."

Man, indeed, in his low estate, loves the supernatural; but it is the supernatural addressed to the imagination, not in all its naked distinctness to the soul; it is the supernatural as belonging to some form of faith more connected with this world than the future; or regarded

as the operation of limited beings, presenting a semblance of human nature, on whom man can react in his turn. But let us imagine, if we can, what would be the feelings of an enlightened philosopher, were he to witness an unquestionable miracle, a work breaking through the secondary agency behind which the Deity ordinarily veils himself, and bringing us into immediate connection with him. We can hardly conceive of the awe, the almost appalling feeling, with which it would be contemplated by one fully capable of comprehending its character, and alive to all its relations. The miracles of Christianity, when they are brought home to the mind as realities, have somewhat of the same power; dimmed as they are by distance, and clouded over by all the errors that false Christianity has gathered round them. If they be true, if Christianity be true, if its doctrines be certain, it is the most solemn fact we can comprehend, as well as the most joyful. It requires that our whole character should be conformed to the new relations which it makes known. All things around us change their aspect. Life and death are not what they were. We are walking on the confines of an unknown and eternal world, where none of those earthly passions, that now agitate men so strongly, can

find entrance. They bear upon them the mark of their doom, soon to perish. But from the revulsion of feeling that must take place when the character of all that surrounds us is thus changed, and the objects of eternity appear before the mind's eye, it is natural that many should shrink, and endeavor to escape from the view, and to forget it amid the familiar things of life; clinging to a vain conception, vain as regards each individual, of an unchanging stability in the order of nature.

Vain, I say, as regards each individual. Whatever we may fancy respecting the unchangeableness of the present order of things, to us it is not permanent. If we are to exist as individuals after death, then we shall soon be called, not to witness, but to be the subjects, of a miracle of unspeakable interest to us. Death will be to us an incontrovertible miracle. For us the present order of things will cease, and the unseen world, from which we may have held back our imagination, our feelings, and our belief, will be around us in all its reality.

If it were not for the abuse of language and confusion of thought that have prevailed, it would be idle to say, that, in denying the miraculous character of Christianity, the truth of

Christianity is denied. Christianity was in itself a transcendent miracle. It was a revelation from God to men of their eternal relations to Him, — an assurance from Him of truths concerning their highest interests, of which they could attain assurance from no other source. It was God's hand raising the veil that separated the material from the spiritual world. Christ was commissioned by God to speak to us in His name, and to make known to us on His authority those truths which it most concerns us to know; and there can be no greater miracle than this. No proof of his divine commission could be afforded, but through miraculous displays of God's power. Nothing is left that can be called Christianity, if its miraculous character be denied. Its essence is gone; its evidence is annihilated. Its truths, involving the highest interests of man, the facts which it makes known, and which are implied in its very existence as a divine revelation, rest no longer on the authority of God. In evidence of those truths nothing remains but the pretended assertions of an individual, of whom we know very little, except that his history and his declarations must have been most grossly misrepresented.

It is indeed difficult to conjecture what any

one can fancy himself to believe of the history of Christ, who rejects the belief of his divine commission and miraculous powers. What conception can such a one form of his character? His whole history, as recorded in the Gospels, is miraculous. It is vain to attempt to strike out what relates directly or indirectly to his miraculous authority and works, with the expectation that any thing consistent or coherent will remain. It is as if one were to undertake to cut out from a precious agate the figure which nature has inwrought, and to pretend, that, by the removal of this accidental blemish, the stone might be left in its original form. If the accounts of Christ's miracles are mere fictions, then no credit can be due to works so fabulous as the pretended histories of his life.

But these supposed miracles, it has been contended, may be explained, consistently with the veracity of the reporters, as natural events, the character of which was mistaken by the beholders. At the first glance it is obvious, that such a statement supposes mistakes committed by those beholders, the disciples and Apostles of Jesus, hardly consistent with any exercise of intellect; and, at the same time, renders it very difficult to free his character from the sus-

picion of intentional fraud. A little further consideration may satisfy us, that, if Jesus really performed no miracles, the accounts of his life that have been handed down from his disciples give evidence of utter folly, or the grossest deception, or rather of both.

But let us suppose that the account of some one or more of the miracles of Christ, especially if detached from its connection, and from all that determines its meaning, admits of being explained as having its origin in some natural event. Take any case one will, however, it must be admitted, that the explanation is not obvious, that it is conjectural; and, in a great majority of cases, it must be allowed, that it is merely possible, and that, to render it deserving of notice, the principle is to be assumed, that whatever is supernatural must be expunged from his history. We will suppose ourselves, then, to have tried this mode of interpretation on one narrative, and to have found it improbable. But, suspending our opinion, let us pass on to another solution of a similar character. A new improbability arises, and after that a new one. These improbabilities consequently multiply upon us in a geometrical ratio, and very soon become altogether overwhelming. Yet I speak not of what may be

done, but of what has been done. This process of misinterpretation has been laboriously pursued through the Gospels; * and the result has been a mass of monstrous conjectures, and abortive solutions, on which, as we proceed, there falls no glimmering of probability; and which continually shock and grate against all our most cherished sentiments of the inestimable value of Christianity, of admiration and love for its Founder on earth, and of reverence for its divine Author.

The proposition, that the history of Jesus is miraculous throughout, is to be understood in all its comprehensiveness. It is not merely that his history is full of accounts of his miracles; it is, that every thing in his history, what relates to himself and what relates to others, is conformed to this fact, and to the conception of him as speaking with authority from God. This is what constitutes the internal evidence of Christianity, a term, as I have said, often used of late with a very indistinct notion of any meaning attached to it. The consistency in the representations given by the different Evangelists of the actions and words of Christ, as a messenger from God to men; their consis-

* See, for example, Paulus's "Commentary on the Gospels"; and his "Life of Jesus."

tency in the representation of a character which it is impossible they should have conceived of, if it had not been exhibited before them, gives us an assurance of their truth, that becomes clearer in proportion as their writings are more studied and better understood; and in connection with this is the consistency of their whole narrative; the coherence and naturalness with which all the words and actions of others bear upon events and upon a character so marvellous, and imply their existence.

The words of Christ, equally with his miracles, imply his mission from God. They are accordant only with the conception of him as speaking with authority from God. They would be altogether unsuitable to a merely human teacher of religious truth. So considered, if not the language of an impostor, they become the language of the most daring and crazy fanaticism. I speak of the general character of his discourses, a character of the most striking peculiarity. In ascribing them to one not miraculously commissioned by God, they must be utterly changed and degraded. What is most solemn and sublime must either be rejected as never having been spoken by him, or its meaning must be thoroughly perverted; it must be diluted into folly, that it may not be blasphemy.

"I am the good shepherd," said Jesus, "and lay down my life for my sheep. . . . . For this, the Father loves me; for I lay down my life, to receive it again. None takes it from me; but I lay it down of my own accord. I have a commission to lay it down, and I have a commission to receive it again. This charge I received from my Father." There are but two aspects under which such words can be regarded, if you suppose it true that they were uttered by Jesus. You must say, in effect, with the unbelieving Jews who heard him, "He is possessed by a demon and is mad. Why listen to him?" Or the view which we take must be essentially that of others who were present: "Can a demoniac open the eyes of the blind?"

Let us look at another passage. To a Christian it appears of unspeakable grandeur and of infinite moment. It presents before him the Founder of his religion as contemplating the immeasurable extent of blessings of which God had made him the minister, as announcing man's immortality amid the sufferings of humanity, on the threshold of the tomb.

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who has faith in me, though he die, shall live;

and he who lives as a believer in me shall never die. Hast thou faith in this?"

Let us go on to the sepulchre of Lazarus.

"I thank thee, Father, that thou hast heard me; and I know that thou hearest me always; but I have thus spoken for the sake of the multitude who are standing round, that they may believe that thou hast sent me."

We must, then, believe that Jesus Christ was sent by God, commissioned to speak to us in his name; or we cannot reasonably pretend to know any thing concerning him. We may think it probable, that he was a reformer of the religion of his nation, who preached for some short time, principally in Galilee; but, having very soon made himself an object of general odium, was put to death as a malefactor, amid the execrations of his countrymen, who then strove, though ineffectually, to suppress his followers. Or, we may fancy him an untaught, but enlightened philosopher, whose character, words, and deeds, whatever they were, have been absurdly and fraudulently misrepresented by his disciples. Or, as the Gospels cannot be regarded as true histories, we may go on to the conclusion at which infidelity, in its folly and ignorance, arrived within the memory of some of us, that no such individual existed, and that

Christ is but an allegorical personage. But to whatever conclusion we may come, if the representation of him in the Gospels be not conformed to his real character and office, no foundation is left, on which any one can with reason pretend to regard him as an object of veneration, or to consider his teachings, whatever effect they may have had upon the world, as of any importance to himself.

To an infidel, whether he openly profess himself to be so, or whether he call himself a Christian, the history in the Gospels must present an insolvable problem. In the former case, he may turn from it, and say that he is not called upon to solve it; but in the latter, he is, by his profession, bound to do so. He has taken upon himself the task of explaining away the history as it stands, and substituting another in its stead; and of so fabricating the new history, that it may afford him ground for professing admiration and love for the real character of Christ.

The rejection of Christianity, in any proper sense of the word, the denial that God revealed himself by Christ, the denial of the truth of the Gospel history, or, as it is called in the language of the sect, the rejection of *historical*

Christianity, is, of course, accompanied by the rejection of all that mass of evidence, which, in the view of a Christian, establishes the truth of his religion. This evidence, it is said, consists only of probabilities. We want certainty. The dwellers in the region of shadows complain, that the solid earth is not stable enough for them to rest on. They have firm footing on the clouds.

To the demand for certainty, let it come from whom it may, I answer, that I know of no absolute certainty, beyond the limit of momentary consciousness, a certainty that vanishes the instant it exists, and is lost in the region of metaphysical doubt. Beyond this limit, absolute certainty, so far as human reason may judge, cannot be the privilege of any finite being. When we talk of certainty, a wise man will remember what he is, and the narrow bounds of his wisdom and of his powers. A few years ago he was not. A few years ago he was an infant in his mother's arms, and could but express his wants, and move himself, and smile and cry. He has been introduced into a boundless universe, boundless to human thought in extent and past duration. An eternity had preceded his existence. Whence came the minute particle of life that he now enjoys? Why

is he here? Is he only with other beings like himself, that are continually rising up and sinking in the shoreless ocean of existence; or is there a Creator, Father, and Disposer of all? Is he to continue a conscious being after this life, and undergo new changes; or is death, which he sees everywhere around him, to be the real, as it is the apparent, end of what would then seem to be a purposeless and incomprehensible existence? He feels happiness and misery; and would understand how he may avoid the one and secure the other. He is restlessly urged on in pursuit of one object after another; many of them hurtful; most of them such as the changes of life, or possession itself, or disease, or age, will deprive of their power of gratifying; while, at the same time, if he be unenlightened by revelation, the darkness of the future is rapidly closing round him. What objects should he pursue? How, if that be possible, is happiness to be secured? A creature of a day, just endued with the capacity of thought, at first receiving all his opinions from those who have preceded him, entangled among numberless prejudices, confused by his passions, perceiving, if the eyes of his understanding are opened, that the sphere of his knowledge is hemmed in by an infinity of

which he is ignorant, from which unknown region clouds are often passing over, and darkening what seemed clearest to his view, — such a being cannot pretend to attain, by his unassisted powers, any assurance concerning the unseen and the eternal, the great objects of religion.

If men had been capable of comprehending their weakness and ignorance, and of reflecting deeply on their condition here, a universal cry would have risen from their hearts, imploring their God, if there were one, to reveal himself, and to make known to them their destiny. Their wants have been answered by God before they were uttered. Such is the belief of a Christian; and there is no question more worthy of consideration, than whether this belief be well founded. It can be determined only by the exercise of that reason which God has given us for our guidance in all that concerns us. There can be no intuition, no direct perception, of the truth of Christianity, no metaphysical certainty. But it would be folly, indeed, to reject the testimony of God concerning all our higher relations and interests, because we can have no assurance that he has spoken through Christ, except such as the condition of our nature admits of.

It is important for us to understand, that, in

all things of practical import, in the exercise of all our affections, in the whole formation of our characters, we are acting, and must act, on probabilities alone. Certainty, in the metaphysical sense of the word, has nothing to do with the concerns of men, as respects this life or the future. We must discuss the subject of religion as we do all other subjects, when men talk with men about matters in which they are in earnest. It would be considered rather as insanity, than folly, were any one to introduce metaphysical scepticism, concerning causality, or identity, or the existence of the external world, or the foundation of human knowledge, into a discussion concerning the affairs of this life, the establishment of a manufactory, for example, or the building of a railroad; or if he should bring it forward to shake our confidence in the facts of which human testimony and our own experience assure us, or to invalidate the conclusions, so far as they relate to this world, which we found on those facts. But we must use the same faculties, and adopt the same rules, in judging concerning the facts of the world which we have not seen, as concerning those of the world of which we have seen a very little.

If it can be shown, according to the common

and established principles of reasoning among men, that Christianity is true; if it can be shown, that to suppose it not true is to suppose a moral impossibility, we need no further evidence. When we have arrived at this conclusion, our ears will be opened to the accordant voice from the earth and from the skies, which bears testimony to a beneficent Creator. We shall find in the immortality assured to us by Christianity, a solution of the problem of our present life; a solution, which the very existence of that problem confirms. We shall perceive, that all which has been taught us by God's revelation corresponds with all that our reason, in its highest exercise, had before been striving to establish. Religion will become to us a conviction. And what conviction, I do not say more probable, but what conviction, of any comparative weight, can be opposed to it? We plan for the future; we propose to ourselves some object to be attained within a short period, or during a course of years. But we proceed throughout upon probabilities; upon a probable judgment of its value, of our power to secure it, of the means at our command, and of the accidents by which we may be favored; and among all these uncertainties enters one far graver, the uncertainty of life itself. Yet

we go on. But, if Christianity be true, there is no doubt about our ability to attain those objects which a religious man proposes to himself; there is no doubt of their inestimable value; and the uncertainty or the shortness of life at once ceases to enter into our calculations.

Of the facts on which religion is founded, we can pretend to no assurance except that derived from the testimony of God, from the Christian revelation. He who has received this testimony is a Christian; and we may ask now, as was asked by an Apostle, "Who is he that overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" Christian faith alone affords such consolation and support as the heart needs amid the deprivations and sufferings of life; it alone gives action and strength to all that is noblest in our nature; it alone furnishes a permanent and effectual motive for growing virtue; it alone enables man to act conformably to his nature and destiny. This is always true. But we may have a deeper sense of the value of our faith, if we look abroad on the present state of the world, and see, all around, the waves heaving and the tempest rising. Everywhere are instability and uncertainty. But from the blind conflict between men exasperated and degraded by injustice and

suffering, and men corrupted and hardened by the abuse of power, from the mutual outrages of angry political parties, in which the most unprincipled and violent become the leaders, from the fierce collision of mere earthly passions and cravings, whatever changes may result, no good is to be hoped. All improvement in the civilized world, all advance in human happiness, is identified with the spread of Christian principles, of Christian truth, of that faith, resting on reason, which connects man with God, makes him feel that the good of others is his personal good, assures him of a future life of retribution, and, by revealing his immortality, calms his passions.

Gentlemen, I have addressed your understandings, not your feelings. But the subject of Christianity is one which cannot be rightly apprehended without the strongest feeling; not the transient excitement existing for an hour, and then forgotten, but a feeling possessing the whole heart, and governing our lives. Of the form of infidelity which we have been considering, there can be but one opinion among honest men. Great moral offences in individuals are, indeed, commonly connected with the peculiar character of their age, and with a pre-

vailing want of moral sentiment in regard to such offences in the community in which they are committed. This may be pleaded in excuse for the individual; but the essential nature of the offence remains. It is a truth, which few among us will question, that for any one to pretend to be a Christian teacher, who disbelieves the divine origin and authority of Christianity, and would undermine the belief of others, is treachery towards God and man. If I were to address such a one, I would implore him by all his remaining self-respect, by his sense of common honesty, by his regard to the well-being of his fellow-men, by his fear of God, if he believe that there is a God, and by the awful realities of the future world, to stop short in his course; and, if he cannot become a Christian, to cease to be a pretended Christian teacher, and to assume his proper character.

If we have taken a correct view of the state of opinion throughout the world, you will perceive that it is a subject of very serious consideration, and of individual action, to all of us who have faith in Christianity, and especially to you, Gentlemen, who have devoted yourselves to the Christian ministry. Every motive that addresses the better part of our nature

urges you to be faithful in your office. A sincere moral purpose will strengthen your judgment and ability; for he who has no object but to do right will not find it difficult to ascertain his duty, and the means of performing it. He who earnestly desires to serve his fellowmen is so strongly drawn toward the truth, as the essential means of human happiness, that he is not likely to be turned aside by any dangerous error. Our Saviour referred to no supernatural illumination when he said, "If any one is desirous to do the will of him who sent me, he will know concerning my doctrine, whether it be from God, or whether I speak from myself." What you believe and feel, it is the business of your lives, and this is a great privilege, to make others believe and feel. In the view of the worldly, the sphere of your duties may often appear humble; but you will not on that account break through it to seek for notoriety beyond. Deep and permanent feeling is very quiet and persevering. It cannot fail in its purposes. It cannot but communicate itself in some degree to others, and it is secure of the approbation of God.

REMARKS

ON THE

MODERN GERMAN SCHOOL OF INFIDELITY.

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When the preceding tract was first published, it was accompanied by a note with a title answering to that above given. This note I afterwards had occasion to illustrate and defend in a separate publication. But the characteristics and tendencies of German infidel philosophy have since been more fully developed. It has thrown aside the veil of pretended Christianity. A visible process of deterioration has been going on; and the effects of that philosophy are now manifest, not only in every department of thought and literature, but in the political and moral condition of Germany.

In what follows, I have preserved, with great additions and changes, the illustrations which I formerly gave. The account thus formed may,

perhaps, possess some historical value, as affording a general view of a state of transition from crude, unreasoning belief in traditionary religious errors, to a virulent, unreasoning rejection of all religious truths. The aspects which the human mind assumed during this transition state are well worth the attention of him who is studying the causes and character of false opinions. During this period there was a rank growth of such opinions, of which the harvest is now gathering in. Our purpose will confine our attention principally to those concerning religion; but they spread through every department of thought.

When I first wrote (about thirteen years ago), the school of theology on which I remarked, with its peculiar characteristic, the attempt to amalgamate Antichristian opinions with Christian language, was still, apparently, in full vigor. It had been gradually developing itself and spreading for more than half a century. But it contained within itself a principle of decay. The partial disguising of opinions in unsuitable language; the keeping up the show of a religious purpose in undermining the foundations of religion; the making a display of mystical feelings, and even of factitious enthusiasm, the cover of heartless unbelief; the

ambiguous use of words and propositions in senses very different from their established meaning; the seeming assertion on one page of what is contradicted on another; the playing fast and loose with the reader, — all this required a certain degree of ingenuity, and produced the impression of superior wisdom and insight in the writer. But the amalgamation attempted was impossible. One extravagance after another was put forth, till it became evident that nothing new was to be said. It was a field in which no fresh reputation was to be gathered. Irreligion under this form had done its worst; and absurdity could go no further. In Germany, therefore, this school of Anti-christian theology began rapidly to decline, from about the time when the preceding tract was written. Even the work on Christian Doctrines (*Christliche Glaubenslehre*) by Strauss, published in 1840 – 41, cannot be considered as properly belonging to it, since that writer relinquishes all pretence of inculcating any religious truth. His book is a controversial attack on what he represents as being, or having been, the doctrines of Christianity, simply and thoroughly irreligious, without disguise. The barrier which the former infidel theology of Germany had imposed upon itself, formed

out of some remains of Christian faith and feeling, and the abuse of Christian language, has given way. In Germany the school has fallen into discredit; and the boldest of its writers, and of their immediate successors, such as Strauss, are regarded by many with little respect, as men who busied themselves about obsolete prejudices.

In much of what follows, therefore, it has become proper to speak of that as past and historical, which but a few years ago might be spoken of as existing. The interest of the subject, however, has not passed away. The cloud in which it was enveloped has been dispelled, and we now see distinctly the steps by which men, at the present day, may be conducted to the rejection of all religious belief. The present state of speculation in Germany — we cannot say of religion or philosophy — is the complement of the past; and they are to be viewed in their connection with each other. What exists now, removes all doubt concerning the essential character of what preceded and produced it. But out of Germany the change has not apparently been so great among the disciples of the German school. By many, the first stage, the stage of religious mysticism and of the abuse of religious language, has not yet been passed through.

The remarks which follow relate principally to what, with reference to the distinction just made, may be called the introductory school of German infidel theology. As may appear from what has been said, the writers of this school are not to be confounded indiscriminately with those who have succeeded them. While it prevailed, the air was full of poisonous miasmata, but the worst symptoms of the pestilence they were breeding had not appeared.

That infidelity should have taken for a disguise the name of Christianity is a remarkable phenomenon, which may be explained in part by the fact, that the principal leaders of the Antichristian school were placed in circumstances in which the profession of Christianity was required, either by the nature of their offices, as professedly Christian teachers, or by a regard to decorum and their worldly interests. But they were surrounded by unbelief. It had thoroughly pervaded the metaphysical philosophy of their country. It had been at work throughout the literature of Continental Europe; and they had neither deep piety, nor moral strength, nor power of comprehension and reasoning, to resist its influence. Christianity they abandoned to its enemies. They

joined those enemies. But it was necessary to have something that might be called Christianity; and they accordingly gave that name to multiform and unstable speculations of their own, unconnected with any established facts or principles; and in framing which it seems to have been forgotten, that what is proposed for belief requires some evidence of its truth.

These speculations were favored by existing modes of thinking and writing. In rude times, when the mind is struggling with half-formed ideas, those claiming superior wisdom have usually affected an obscure, enigmatic, paradoxical style, full of words and figures remote from the apprehension of the vulgar. Dark sayings are characteristic of one stage in the progress of the human intellect. The meaning which is not clearly understood by its propounder is thus sheltered from investigation, and his oracles are enabled to escape from confutation in the darkness. His teachings are magnified by mystery; and the disciple thinks himself initiated in some esoteric doctrine, too profound for common minds. Instead of the care with which a true philosopher endeavors to express real knowledge in the most perspicuous manner, there is a constant striving to disguise

trivial, erroneous, and extravagant conceptions in unusual forms of language.

The same phenomena are likely to occur whenever any great revolution takes place in men's opinions. In such seasons mysticism flourishes. The mind loses its customary landmarks, distrusts its former belief, renounces its former guides, and, leaving the beaten path, becomes the bewildered follower of him who professes most boldly his acquaintance with the unexplored region on which it is entering. It is confused between new and old opinions, and sees nothing distinctly. Words lose their former meanings, and acquire no stable significations instead; old errors and essential truths are abandoned in common, and paradoxical novelties are enunciated in a new language, understood neither by those who use nor by those who listen to it.

I shall, therefore, in further pointing out some of the characteristics of the German infidel school of theology, *begin by remarking on confusion of thought and unmeaning language, connected with the theory, that Christian faith has its origin in the mind itself, independently of the Christian revelation, and with the denial of the truths of religion.*

These characteristics will be apparent throughout the passages which I shall have occasion to quote or refer to, but may be first illustrated from the writings of De Wette. Perhaps no theologian of the German school had more direct influence on opinion out of Germany, though this influence was somewhat disproportioned, I believe, to his reputation among his countrymen. He is, however, a fair, or, rather, a favorable representative of the school. One of his last publications on the theory of religion appeared in 1834, in a theological journal.* It is a review of a work in defence of the genuineness of the writings of the New Testament.† Its purpose is to show that, as regards establishing the truth of Christianity, all works of this kind are equally unnecessary and fruitless. A Christian's faith, according to him, is not to be founded on reasoning. It is the result of intuition, of a consciousness of the truths of religion; and certainty is therefore of its essence. But reason deals with probabilities, and can afford no certainty. In this article he gives a professed ex-

* "Theologische Studien und Kritiken," edited by Ullmann and Umbreit.

† "Nachweis der Echtheit sämmtlicher Schriften des N. T.," by Olshausen.

position of what he calls the "New Theology," which it had been the main purpose of his theological life to establish. It might be supposed that he must have reflected much on the subject, and have been able to give an intelligible exposition of it.

"The greatest and most pregnant idea of the New Theology," he says, "and one the establishment of which is the main business of my theological life, is, that the doctrine of faith must contain no metaphysics, or at least only so much as is necessary for a clear understanding of the faith; that its essence is not in scientific propositions, but in the pious consciousness scientifically purified and enlightened." *

The shadowy and shapeless meaning of the sentence I have quoted escapes in any attempt to grasp it. But this fact may not be universally admitted. He whose own conceptions are vague and inconsistent is not sensible of the want of definiteness or meaning in what he

* "Es ist die grösste und fruchtbarste Idee der neuern Theologie (und deren Geltendmachung ist die Hauptaufgabe meines theologischen Lebens), dass die Glaubenslehre keine Metaphysik oder doch nur soviel davon enthalten darf, als zur klaren Verständigung des Glaubens nöthig ist, dass ihr Wesen nicht in wissenschaftlichen Sätzen, sondern in dem wissenschaftlich gereinigten und erleuchteten frommen Bewusstseyn besteht." — *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, first number for 1834, p. 137.

reads. He attaches some unformed notions to words that in fact convey no coherent ideas; and may regard himself in consequence as a profound thinker, able to discover a meaning which less wise men cannot see.

Let us examine the passage more carefully. Giving to the particular words any sense which we can suppose to have been intended, no comprehensible meaning can be disentangled from them.

"The doctrine of faith" (that is to say, what is proposed for religious belief) "must contain no metaphysics, or at least only so much as is necessary for a clear understanding of the faith": — We can ascribe no sense to any of these words but their obvious one; and, this being the case, there is no intelligible meaning in the proposition. All the objects of religious faith, — God, the human soul, the spiritual world, the principles of moral action, — and every other, with all the questions that arise concerning them, belong to the province of metaphysical science. The proposition with its concluding qualification is equally without meaning, as if one were to say, that a geologist, in explaining his doctrine concerning the changes which the earth has undergone, should introduce no physical ideas, or introduce them only so far as

is necessary to a clear understanding of his theory. The word "metaphysics" seems to have been used with no regard to its proper meaning, but only in reference to the accidental and false associations which it may carry with it, — associations, natural enough in the mind of a German scholar, of something adverse to the common sentiments of men, enveloped in barbarous terms of science, which seem used to mystify, not to explain, — something crabbed, obscure, and unintelligible; whereas the true science of metaphysics is only good sense applied to the highest objects of thought; and good sense is always intelligible.

But to proceed. — "The essence of the doctrine of faith" (that is, what is essential in the doctrines of religion) "does not consist in scientific propositions": — Every faith, or belief, however attained, consists in the belief of truths, real or supposed; and these real or supposed truths are to be expressed in words; and these words form propositions. Every doctrine is a proposition, — or a number of propositions, that is, if the word "doctrine" be used in the singular to denote a body of doctrines. If the sentence, therefore, have any meaning, it must depend entirely on the word "scientific."

But science is only knowledge, or what is believed to be knowledge, digested into a system. A scientific proposition is a proposition making part of such a system, one connected with and confirmed by other propositions supposed to be true. It is asserted, then, that what is essential in religious belief does not consist of propositions, that is of truths, having any such relation to each other as to admit of their being arranged into a coherent system. This is what is actually asserted; what was in the mind of the writer, when putting forth this assertion, cannot be conjectured with any confidence.

So far from consisting in scientific propositions, "the essence of the doctrine of faith consists in the pious consciousness": — The "essence of the doctrine of faith" must mean the essential truths which are the objects of faith. What is affirmed, therefore, is, that those truths consist in "the pious consciousness," — namely, of those truths. It is evident that words cannot be put together more illogically with any show of meaning. One may conjecture something of the intended purpose of the writer, not from what he here says, but from the theory which he elsewhere maintains. This theory, as I have before said, is, that the truths of religion

are directly apprehended as such by the mind through a faculty which he sometimes calls consciousness, sometimes presentiment,* and sometimes feeling. With this imaginary faculty of apprehending these truths he confounds the truths themselves. The indistinct meaning which he had in mind was, I suppose, something like this, — that what is properly to be called religious faith does not rest on truths which may be proved through the exercise of reason, but consists in a faculty of the mind through which the truths of religion are intuitively discerned.

"The essence of the doctrine of faith con-

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* "Ahnung," *presentiment:* — As used for a scientific term, Krug (in his Dictionary of Philosophy) states it to mean, "the idea of an object which has not yet entered the consciousness with clearness, but which is beginning to approach it," — die Vorstellung eines Gegenstandes, der noch nicht mit Klarheit in die Bewusstsein getreten ist, sich aber demselben schon zu nähern beginnt. I suppose that, in strictness, the word denotes a pretended faculty of perceiving such ideas, rather than the ideas themselves. It seems meant to express "a dim premonitory consciousness of a truth before it is clearly discerned."

Apparently this conception was introduced into the new theology from the philosophy of Epicurus, who rested his belief in the existence of the gods, according to his idea of them, on what he calls the "anticipation" (*anticipatio*, προλήψις) of them in the human mind, the preëxisting notion of them (*prænotio*), — existing before instruction, and common to every nation and every class of men. (Cicero, De Naturâ Deorum, Lib. I. §§ 16, 17.)

sists," that is, the essential truths which are the objects of religious faith consist in "the pious consciousness, scientifically purified and enlightened": — We may translate this proposition into words that apparently express its intended meaning thus: — The mind when in a pious state has intuitions, or is conscious of certain ideas, which, when scientifically purified and enlightened, become the truths of religion. Certainly, men in a pious state of mind have religious conceptions and feelings. But this unquestionable fact affords no support for a new theory concerning the grounds of belief in religion. According to the theory under consideration, the only proper and secure ground of belief in religion is consciousness of its truths. Consciousness is absolute certainty. To qualify it with the epithet "pious," as if something more than simple consciousness were necessary, shows a confusion of mind in which the writer did not discern his own meaning. But it must be not only pious, it must be scientifically purified and enlightened. It appears, then, that consciousness, or intuition, our only source of certain knowledge, requires to be corrected and modified by some other knowledge digested into a science.

Such is the account which was given by one of the most conspicuous teachers of German theology, of the doctrine which it had been the main purpose of his theological life to explain and defend. But I have not quoted the passage for the sake of illustrating De Wette's character as a writer, but for the more general purpose of illustrating the prevailing character of modern German works of speculation. Everywhere in these writings we find like confusion of thought, and a similar unintelligible use of language. Propositions are so vaguely expressed as to present no meaning on which the mind can rest. We read on in the hope that what follows may afford an explanation of the intended sense; but what follows, instead of throwing light on what we have gone over, is itself involved in equal obscurity. It is like pursuing a pretended algebraic process, in which the value of an unknown term in one equation is to be determined by the value of another equally unknown in the equation which succeeds, and so on to the end.

But this sort of writing is of great antiquity, has been very prevalent, and finds many admirers, who are struck with wonder at the marvels which may be produced by the abuse of words. It consists not merely in putting together words

whose sense is known in such a manner that nothing intelligible is the result of the combination; but in employing words, often newly fashioned, or newly applied, with undefined and undefinable meanings, — familiar words with senses new and old which are confused together, — and many-sided words, of which sometimes one and sometimes another aspect is presented to the reader.

In the German language, the significations of many words are more unsteady and uncertain than in our own, or in the Southern languages of Europe. Their outline is undefined and varying. Words have not been determined to precise meanings by habits of accurate usage and associations long connected with them. They do not, equally as with us, when standing in certain relations to other words and ideas, present invariably and instantaneously the true sense required by the connection. The associations and implications connected with one signification of a word become confused with those connected with another; and even significations widely distinct are confounded together. Thus, to illustrate by an example, the same German word, *Wunder*, signifies either a *miracle*, or merely a *wonder*, "a wonderful natural object or event"; and the

rejection of the miraculous character of Christianity has doubtless been facilitated by the ease with which the mind may pass from one of those opposite meanings to the other, on account of their being both expressed by the same word. So, likewise, the word *Glaube* denotes at once *faith*, religious faith, and *belief*, that is, the belief of any supposed truth whatever, and more especially the belief of self-evident or intuitive propositions; and, together with this, it is used to denote also an imaginary faculty by which we assent to such propositions, which have been called "the convictions of pure reason." Hence has followed great confusion of thought. I will give one example more from the science of metaphysics. Each of the German words *sinnlich* and *sensual* — the latter of which almost seems to have been adopted into the language for the sake of the equivoque — combines the meanings of "sensible," that is, belonging to or perceptible by the senses, and of "sensual." It has been attempted to introduce into our language the barbarism of using "sensual" as if it meant sensible, or founded on the senses; and hence, through a series of errors, we have heard of the *sensual* philosophy of Locke, — an epithet which from its associations is so utterly

inappropriate, that, even if it had the meaning given it, good sense and good taste would forbid its use. As I have elsewhere remarked, almost all the words expressive of religious ideas have had a new sense put upon them, in which they are familiarly used.* The abuse has made inroads into our own language, and thus it has become necessary jealously to guard it, or its whole meaning in the higher departments of thought will be broken down, the cultivation and growth of centuries will be destroyed, and it will be reduced to a waste in which the wildest speculations may flourish.

Of words which have been used without any definite or settled meaning we have a notable example in the passage quoted from De Wette. It is the word "consciousness," *Bewusstseyn.* The German word has a nebulous meaning, of which that of "consciousness" forms only the nucleus. "Consciousness" in our language denotes a "knowledge of what passes in one's own mind"; † or a knowledge of the present state of one's own mind. It carries with it the idea of absolute certainty. This is its only proper meaning. But the German word, *Bewusstseyn*, comprehends the sense of "percep-

* See the preceding tract, p. 240. † Locke and Johnson.

tion" in its metaphysical use, of "sentiment" considered as a judgment founded on or connected with feeling, and of "imagination" operating to produce belief more or less distinct, as when it becomes synonymous with *Ahnung*, "presentiment." In theology it has been used, as we have seen, to denote an imaginary faculty of directly apprehending the facts of religion as such, or, to use another term, the supposed apperception of those facts. It is not here the place to speak of its vague use in popular language, in which it has become almost a cant word, often occurring with a meaning only to be conjectured. But to all the senses that have been expressly mentioned, the idea of certainty which belongs only to its proper signification has continued attached, and those senses with this false association have, through the influence of German speculations and phraseology, been transferred into our own language and given to the word "consciousness." In further explaining the subject I must continue to use this word as the representative of the German *Bewusstseyn.*

The history of its introduction to its present use as a theological term is given by the ecclesiastical historian Neander in a discourse delivered by him (in 1839) before the University at

Berlin in commemoration of the institution of the Protestant Church in the Mark of Brandenburg.* He represents the religion taught by the Reformers as "pervading the minds of men, and producing among the people a certain common consciousness of Christian truth," which is "the witness of Christian truth." "The name I use," he says, "*Christian consciousness*, is indeed new; and to have formed it in correspondence with the nature of the subject, and to have introduced it into common use, is not the least among the great merits of the sainted Schleiermacher, whom we reverence as the teacher of Germany." He quotes the words of his colleague Steffens, who had said: "There are expressions which in themselves have a great historical significance." By the introduction of this term, "it was as if through Schleiermacher the conception which all men were seeking suddenly became clear to all, as if he had found out the right word of the riddle."

What the riddle was is not explained, and I can offer no conjecture concerning it. But from this account it appears that its solution, the fortunate discovery of the *mot d'énigme*,

* Commentatio de Georgio Vicelio.

"consciousness," had for a time the happy effect of composing religious differences in Germany and bringing men to an agreement in its use. This agreement in the use of the word — in a great variety of senses — has continued at least till a very late period; but the other good effect of its introduction has not been lasting. According to Neander, "Christian consciousness" signifies "a consciousness of Christian truth" which is "the witness of Christian truth"; that is, an intuitive knowledge of those facts which concern man as an immortal being, and of which it has been supposed that no assurance can be obtained except through the revelation by which God has made them known. The existence of this form of intuition, heretofore unknown, should have been proved before so much importance was attached to it. What it attests as Christian truth should have been defined. According to Neander, it bore testimony to the doctrines of the early Reformers, especially of Luther, and was the occasion of their rapid spread. If this were its true office, it must have lost much of its efficacy in modern days.

However that may be, the doctrine of the new theology was, that on consciousness, on the intuitive perception of the facts of religion,

Christian faith rests as its only sure foundation, or is identical with it. "Faith, as such," says De Wette, "is free from doubt. If connected with doubts, how could it produce resolutions, afford consolation? Resolution as such, consolation which is real, are both directly opposed to doubt and to the deliberation which is ever more or less connected with it, and exclude them, or, more correctly, presuppose that they are never in a state to shake the feeling of faith."* Whatever else may be thought of these sentences as rendered into English, they are perhaps sufficiently intelligible in respect to the point for which I have quoted them.

"Faith, as such, is free from doubt": — We cannot suppose that in these words, which are the foundation of all that follows, nothing more was meant than to assert the truism, that perfect faith or belief on any subject excludes all doubt; or to maintain that a Christian may and should, through the exercise of his reason, attain full assurance of the truth of his religion. Neither proposition can afford any ground for a new theory of religion. The meaning intended is, that religious faith, as such, is

* Article before quoted, p. 136.

intuitive certainty; and the purpose of what follows is to maintain, that what may be called faith, or religious belief, is not true faith, unless it possess this essential characteristic.

The doctrine that the mind possesses a faculty of intuitively discerning the truths of religion is not only utterly untenable, but the proposition is of such a character, that it cannot well bear the test of being distinctly stated. It is the fundamental proposition to be maintained in those speculations, the end of which is to set aside equally the exercise of our reason and the authority of God's revelation, as the foundation of our religious belief; yet its defenders shrink from presenting it in broad daylight. They are disposed to keep it out of view behind a cloud of words. The question respecting the existence of such a faculty is not difficult to be decided. We are not conscious of possessing any such faculty; and there can be no other proof of its existence. We are conscious that we possess no such faculty; and there can be no more conclusive proof of its non-existence. It is unnecessary in strict reasoning to add any thing more. The bubble which has been blown up into so glittering a theory, with such changeable colors, bursts at the first touch of truth.

But much more may be added. An error

which has taken possession of the mind, especially an error which has no foundation in reason, and consequently has never been subjected to the test of reason, can hardly be dislodged by a single argument, however decisive. Let us then go on a little further. Consciousness or intuition can inform us of nothing but what exists in our own minds, including the relations of our own ideas. It has no cognizance of external facts. It is, therefore, not an intelligible error, but a mere absurdity, to maintain that we are conscious, or have an intuitive knowledge, of the being of God, of our own immortality, of the revelation of God through Christ, or of any other fact of religion.

That such a faculty belongs to the human mind, that men have within them such a sure guide to religious truth, is a doctrine that stands in direct opposition to the whole history of the working of men's minds on the subject of religion, — to our knowledge of the gross ignorance and of the degrading superstitions that have prevailed throughout the world, and are still conspicuous in every part of it. But the doctrine, or some one equivalent, has flourished amid all the confusion of opposing creeds. The claim to a power, natural or supernatural, enabling its possessor clearly to discern the truth

without the exercise of reason, has been made with equal confidence by men asserting contradictory errors. It is not an invention of modern times, though the application which has been made of it may be novel. In maintaining error, it is an obvious, and often the only plausible course, to confront reason with a claim to infallibility.

One point remains, not important as an argument against this imaginary faculty, but deserving attention as illustrating the character of German speculation. De Wette, in the Introduction to his "Manual of Christian Doctrines," * treats of the essential character of religion, and lays down the elements of his system. His purpose is to show, that religious ideas arise in the mind through a process of self-development. After giving an account of this process he says: "God, freedom [man's freedom in action], and immortality cannot be proved, but only shown to be necessary ideas in [of] the reason." †

"The truths of religion cannot be proved": — No attempt, therefore, is made to prove them. That ideas or conceptions of the objects of re-

* "Lehrbuch der christlichen Dogmatik."

† Vol. I. p. 9, 3d ed.

ligion arise in the mind from any cause whatever, supposing that they do so arise, is no evidence of the real existence of those objects. We cannot argue from the former fact to the latter, in this any more than in any analogous case. We might as rationally infer the existence of fairies and mermaids from the existence of our ideas concerning them, or that of the gods of Epicurus from the "presentiment" of the Epicureans, or the reality of the objects of Grecian or Hindu mythology from the conceptions of them developed in the minds of the Greeks or Hindus.

"The truths of religion cannot be proved": — What is meant by this? A truth is proved of which we have sufficient evidence. For the truths of religion, according to the theory we are considering, we have the evidence of consciousness, and what evidence can be more decisive? Is it supposed that, while we have an undoubting belief through our consciousness, the understanding may remain unconvinced? There is no hope of finding meaning or coherence in a doctrine which rests on such irreconcilable propositions.

"The truths of religion cannot be proved": — This aspect of the theory has been recognized by many of its disciples. They have, in conse-

quence, been inclined to consider religious faith as an act of the will. The truths of religion, according to them, are to be discerned only by the "*pious*" consciousness. They are addressed, not to the understanding, but to the heart. They are not subjects for examination and reasoning, but objects of feeling. They are to be received with childlike docility. The state of mind insisted upon as requisite for their admission may bring to one's recollection the exhortation of St. Paul: — "Be not, brothers, children in understanding; be as free from malice as children, but in understanding be men." *

But it would have been strange, if even a German theorist had left his system so wholly unsupported as that of De Wette appears in the last quotation from him, and in the expositions of many who may seem to have adopted it. He does not do so. In common with more orthodox makers of religious systems, he provides it, in the absence of any help from reason, with supernatural aid. He says: —

"Man, as we have seen, carries with him the germ of religion in the faculties of faith and presentiment. We may call this a *natural* capacity, since it certainly falls into the series of the in-

* 1 Corinthians xiv. 20.

ner phenomena, and belongs to the inner nature, but more properly a *supernatural gift of God*, since it is the highest of all inner phenomena, placed above all arbitrary will of men, and proclaims itself to be a property of our self-subsistent, eternal essence. We discern (*ahnen*) in it a spark of the divine spirit, for God in his relation to nature is first to be discerned by us in our own nature. We call this the *inner divine* revelation." *

Through the mockery of meaning which this passage presents, we discover what may be considered as a final account of the words "faith," "presentiment," and consequently of their equivalent, "consciousness"; namely, that they denote a supernatural faculty belonging to the human mind, which assures us of the truths of religion. Should any one holding the doctrine of Calvin respecting the natural inability of man to apprehend the truths of religion as such, maintain that, through special grace, he has supernatural assurance of those truths, we might easily believe him to understand himself and to think what he says; but if one discussing the subject, as a common man with common men, assert that he has naturally a super-

* Lehrbuch der christlichen Dogmatik, I. 20, 21.

natural assurance of any truth whatever, the case may be regarded as one of those the symptoms of which are not likely to be allayed by reasoning. *Non*

> "Sunt verba et voces, quibus hunc lenire dolorem
> Possis."

According to De Wette, what are represented in history as revelations, so far as they have any title to that character, are manifestations of "the inner divine revelation," made by *inspired* individuals (*Begeisterte*), who are messengers of God. But such revelations have all been mixed with error, and what those individuals have taught is to be subjected to the test of the "inner divine revelation," and has no authority but what it derives from its accordance with it.* The connection between faith and historical Christianity consists in the fact, that the influence and spirit of those truths which are internally perceived by faith were developed in Christ, the pattern or model man, who founded a community, to which he transmitted that influence and spirit, and in which they have continued to be developed. His history is properly no object of religious faith. No new warranty of those truths is given by their hav-

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* Ibid. I. 26, 28, et seqq.

ing been taught by him. The earlier Christians did not believe them for this reason.*

* Speaking of the earliest times of Christianity, he says: "The warranty of these truths did not consist in their having been taught by Christ; for how seldom does the Apostle Paul appeal to the declarations of Christ. . . . . A properly historical knowledge and examination of what Christ may have taught belonged not at all to the conditions of the original Christian faith." The last sentence is distinguished as emphatic by the mode of printing in the original. See the article by De Wette, in the *Theol. Studien und Kritiken*, pp. 143, 144.

There are, according to De Wette, two things to be considered respecting Christ's teaching as recorded in the Gospels, — one, whether it is truly reported, the other, whether considered in itself it is true; whether it "authenticates itself to the pious spirit as divine revelation." The latter consideration is wholly independent of the former. The truth contained in his teaching as reported, "whether Jesus taught it or not, carries its validity with it. Is the unity and holiness of God more true because Jesus proclaimed it?* By no means. His name can as little add any thing to the truth of this conviction* as take any thing from it; and had he denied it, we should not believe him." — *Ueber Religion und Theologie*, 2d ed., p. 177.

According to De Wette, our Saviour taught the unity and holiness of God, and these doctrines are to be received because they "authenticate themselves to the pious spirit." According to later and more advanced philosophers of the German school, he taught, or should have taught, pantheism, the doctrines of Spinoza or of Hegel, doctrines which commend themselves more effectually to the pious consciousness. If indeed he had anticipated Spinoza, Schleiermacher might have transferred to him the famous eulogy (to be hereafter noticed) which he bestows on the latter.

* It becomes necessary to observe, that here and elsewhere the translator is not responsible for the want of grammar, or the misuse of language.

The outline of his history is true; but, as regards the accounts in the Gospels, there is much that is questionable, when critically examined. These accounts are to be regarded morally and spiritually, rather than in their literal meaning. They are to be viewed as symbolical of the *ideal* in religion, by which De Wette means the truths of religion as recognized by consciousness. Thus the accounts may have ideal truth without historical reality, and, apart from all inquiry into their authenticity, may serve for spiritual edification. The ascription of a symbolical character to the Gospel history is a characteristic of the speculations of De Wette, borrowed from Kant; and, in adopting and applying this principle, he was one of the theologians who prepared the way for the extravagances of Strauss.

De Wette says, in a passage already quoted: — "Is the unity and holiness of God more true because Jesus proclaimed it? By no means." This assertion can have no bearing on the point which he is endeavoring to maintain, till it is converted into a general proposition, as follows: — The truths of religion are not more true because they were taught by Christ. One may add, with De Wette, Certainly not; — that is, he may do so if he is able to connect any

meaning with the expression of making a truth more true. But this assertion is not what is needed to confirm the doctrine which the writer is endeavoring to maintain. A very different one is required. It is, that no new evidence of the truths, or, to use another term, of the facts of religion, can be afforded by a revelation from God. It must be maintained, that we are already fully possessed of evidence which, being conclusive in itself, annihilates the value of all other. Yet the futile sophism I have adverted to, that truth is not more true because it was taught by Christ, has been current; though I do not recollect to have seen it put forth by an English writer of any note.

On what ground, then, did these theorists contend that their doctrines were to be called Christianity? — for they insisted on retaining that name. It was this; — according to them, their doctrines were the teachings of "the inner divine revelation"; and with these teachings the doctrines of Christ, so far as they can be ascertained, may be considered as coincident. I say, so far as they can be ascertained; for we are told, that "one finds himself entangled in great difficulties in attempting to ascertain the true *doctrine* of Jesus from the Gospels"; that "it is very differently and ambiguously re-

ported by the Evangelists"; that, "according to John, it was not the same as according to the first three Evangelists"; — and that, in regard to his *history* as given in the Gospels, there are similar difficulties; that "we find in it many contradictions, chasms, enigmas, and mysteries"; that "but few at the present day can receive the miracles as such, and that there is great difficulty in separating the miraculous aspect [of a relation] from the proper fact [which was the foundation of it], and in comprehending how the Apostles should have seen miracles where there were none"; * that, "in sum, these pretended contemporary relations are very far from approving themselves as such by their internal character; and that they trans-

* I leave this sentence standing as translated from the first edition of De Wette's work (page 151), which was published in 1815, not having the second, which appeared in 1821, at hand when I first wrote. In the second edition it reads thus: — "There are many of the marvels (*Wunder*) related by them [the Evangelists], that but few now-a-days can receive as pure historical facts, and there is great difficulty in one's forming for himself a living, original view of them (*eine lebendige ursprüngliche Ansicht davon*)." The words relating to the Apostles are omitted. It is apparent that in the earlier written of the two sentences the word *Wunder* denotes a *miracle*, in the later written, a *marvel*, corresponding to the ambiguous meaning of the word before pointed out. A comparison of them together, likewise illustrates the gradual progress from less to more open scepticism which characterized the theology of the times.

mit to us the history of Jesus in a form in which we cannot readily receive it." *

Such was the relation of the new theology to Christianity, — a relation which afforded no reasonable, nor even intelligible, motive for assuming its name, or for representing the doctrines taught by that theology as coincident with those of Christ. But the absurdity of calling the new theory by the name of Christianity did not stop here. It was further pretended, that this theory alone furnished the internal evidence of our religion in the testimony of consciousness, and that this was the only evidence on which it could rest. But this pretence of placing Christianity on unassailable ground, upon what was falsely called its internal evidence, — this theory, that the facts which it reveals are directly perceived by the mind, — was utterly inconsistent with any belief in Christianity as a revelation from God. The language of religion has been so abused by the writers of this school, that it may be worth while to say that I use those words in their customary and proper sense. No rational man can suppose that God has miraculously revealed facts which the very constitution of our nature enables us directly to perceive.

* De Wette, Ueber Religion und Theologie, 2d ed., pp. 178, 179.

Some of the earlier English Deistical writers (Lord Herbert may be cited as an example), though repelled from Christianity by the errors which in their day were incorporated in the representations given of it, still maintained doctrines which are essentially truths of religion, and consequently thus far coincident with the teaching of Christ. Had this been the case with the infidel theologians of Germany, there might have seemed to be some pretext for calling their systems by the name of Christianity. But such was not the case. Their doctrines on the most important subjects, the doctrines maintained by the most noted of their number, were not in accordance with, but in opposition to, the truths taught us by God through Christ.

If there be any fact of which we are assured by revelation, it is that of man's capacity of attaining an immortal existence. "I am the resurrection and eternal life," * said our Saviour; "whoever believes in me, though he die, shall live." On this truth the whole fabric of Christianity rests. The doctrine of immortality was the foundation of all that he taught his disci-

* Ἡ ζωή, — which cannot properly be expressed in English but by the terms "eternal life," or "eternal blessedness."

ples, of all his presentations of duty, his exhortations, his encouragements, and his warnings. He draws no motives from merely earthly considerations. He does not speak as a merely human teacher. There is a single passage which may seem, at first sight, to form an exception to these remarks; but its seeming, not, I think, real incongruity, only serves to illustrate more strongly the essential, distinguishing character of his teaching.* Without the belief of this doctrine there can be no religion; — for

* I refer to the passage, Luke xiv. 7 – 11, in which our Lord directs a guest to take the lowest seat at an entertainment, that when his inviter comes he may be told by him to go up higher, and may thus be honored in the presence of the other guests. This is not, I conceive, a literal direction. It is called by the Evangelist a "parable"; and I am not aware that that name was ever applied to a simple precept or maxim of conduct to be understood literally. So to use it would be contrary to its etymology, which implies a comparison.

The occasion and meaning of this parable may be thus explained. Like many other parables of our Lord, it referred to, and was apparently suggested by, something immediately present. The Pharisees and Teachers of the Law were, doubtless, those who, after their fashion, chose out the higher places at table. They likewise considered themselves as being, through their sanctity, entitled to the highest places in the kingdom of Heaven. The blessings of this kingdom are often spoken of under the figure of a feast, as they are in this chapter, in the fifteenth verse and what follows it. It was against the peculiar claim to those blessings which they thought themselves to possess, that the parable was, as I conceive, directed, — against their arrogance and presumption.

what can any truths of religion, any truths relating to the eternal and the unseen, concern the feelings and the conduct of beings whose existence is limited to a few years in this world of the senses?

What, then, was the doctrine of the new theology on this subject? De Wette, in his work "On Religion and Theology," treats of the soul and of "its immortality, or more correctly," as he says, "its eternity," — an eternity, as he explains himself, having equal relation to the past and the future. Its nature can be apprehended only by the consciousness, by "presentiment" and "faith," not by the understanding. So apprehended, it appears free from all relations to time and space, it "presents a living point of the eternal being." If he understood himself, and I understand him, he teaches that eternity is an essential attribute of the soul. The importance of conceiving of it as having no relation to time and space is strongly insisted upon, though it is not explained what meaning this can have, except that it does not exist anywhere, or during any time. Forgetting his own precept, that the doctrine of faith must contain nothing metaphysical, or at least only so much as is necessary for its clear explanation, he involves the subject in the gross ob-

scurity of German transcendental philosophy. "The doctrine of Kant," he says, "concerning the subjectivity of the forms of time and space, is of immeasurable importance for the clear view of religion." This alone can free us from doubts concerning the eternity of the soul.

But, upon emerging from this darkness, we find the propositions which concern this fundamental truth of religion plainly expressed, or rather, I should say, with so much plainness that their bearing is quite intelligible.

"The idea of a continuance after death," he says, "is very common," but "death destroys our temporal and local existence, and after it, therefore, our eternal being must pass out of space and time." "We must not imagine that after death we shall commence a new period of existence like the present, and still less, that we shall have a like, though more noble and splendid, dwelling-place." "If we speak of the continuance of the soul after death in time and space, we are compelled to inquire after its preëxistence. For an existence *a parte post* supposes an existence *a parte ante;* and the latter presents even more difficulties than the former. Did we exist before birth, why have we no remembrance of it? And, if no consciousness of this state remain to us, how will

a consciousness of our present earthly life remain to us after death? And yet this is precisely what the most of men are concerned about. They wish to take with them their consciousness, their remembrance of this life into the other. The pious man who has a clear understanding of his faith . . . . . can only laugh at the solicitude about the consciousness, as we should laugh at the child who should be afraid that when grown up it could no longer play with dolls." "In death we shall lose this consciousness, which is only the growth of the world of the senses, and is connected with it, and shall receive instead *a higher consciousness*, of which we have now no conception." "The idea of the immortality of the soul should as little serve for indicating to us in the prospect a compensation for this life when we are obliged to quit it, as for filling us with superstitious hopes concerning a much happier life hereafter; . . . . . it should teach us to live here every moment in eternity, and to think and conduct ourselves worthily of it. And to that end we should not direct a curious or longing glance to what may await us after death, but, fixing our eyes steadily on death and on our perishable lot, and going forward to meet it calmly, find already here the eternal and un-

changeable, namely, in our own breasts, in the higher worth of our spiritual essence." *

The concluding sentences of this extract afford a specimen of a common characteristic of writers of this class, — an attempt to connect the nobler feelings which true religion inspires with the doctrines that they have substituted in its place, — a sickly glimmering of sentiment that shows amid the surrounding darkness like the phosphoric light generated by corruption.

Throughout the speculations of the new theology, as in what we have just quoted, we find the conception of the eternity of the soul disconnected from the belief of the personal immortality of individual men, — an eternity in which the soul has undergone and will undergo a succession of essential changes. There has been current both in ancient and in modern times a vague notion that the *same* soul may pass through different states of existence, losing its consciousness and acquiring a new one at each transition, and thus form a succession of individuals, each with a distinct personality. But, in maintaining this doctrine, there has been no attempt to answer the question, What constitutes it the same soul? Till this ques-

* Ueber Religion und Theologie, pp. 20–26.

tion is answered, the doctrine is only a confusion of words without meaning.

The soul of a man is the man himself. It is the feeling, thinking, conscious being. Whatever may be affirmed of an individual as a perceptive, intelligent, conscious being may be affirmed of his soul, — and nothing else. To maintain that the same soul may constitute a different individual, is equivalent to maintaining that an individual remaining the same may become another individual. It is possible, however, as we have seen, for one to form an imagination, though not a rational conception, of his soul as existing separate from himself. Proceeding, therefore, on this imagination, we may ask, What personal interest can any one have in the future fate of this soul, which is not himself?

Such was the teaching of the new theology in opposition to that truth which it most concerns men to believe. The pretended religion of consciousness, of the feelings, and of "faith," tended directly to the destruction of all rational belief in religion, and of all true religious feeling and principle. Its tendency was obvious from the first, and soon became clearly developed in its workings. It passed, by scarcely sensible degradations, into the grossest forms of

irreligion. In its earliest stages it connected itself with attacks on the credibility of the Gospels, and with the denial of the possibility of miracles. It even allied itself with the pantheism of Spinoza, and of the later German metaphysicians, the successors of Kant. Still talking about Christianity, and still claiming to be a sort of religion, it made some show of itself in the works of such writers as Strauss; — till at last this school of speculation has arrived at its final result in the abnegation of all religious principle, and the contempt of morality, which are the boast of many of those who form the party calling itself "Young Germany."

The character of the new theology made itself manifest in its effects on the popular literature of Germany contemporary with it. Goethe was then its acknowledged head. His ideas of religion, as he professes in his autobiography, were derived essentially from the system of Spinoza, of whom early in life he was, as he says, "the enthusiastic disciple, and the most decided worshipper."* He professed himself to be a believer in the immortality of the soul; — in what sense of those words we

* Aus meinem Leben, Book XIV.

shall immediately see. I doubt much that in his writings one can find an unequivocal recognition of the truth of that doctrine in any sense whatever; but his opinions are to be gathered from some records of his conversation preserved by Falk and Eckermann. According to Falk, on the day of Wieland's funeral, "there was a tone of solemnity in Goethe which one rarely witnessed"; and "our conversation on this occasion turned on topics out of the sphere of the senses, which he generally avoided, if he did not regard them with contempt." Wieland's soul he conceived to be possessed of too high powers ever to perish. He gave his theory of souls, probably, I think, improvised for his admiring listener. Borrowing a term from Leibnitz, as one adapted to express the most simple form of being, he represented all souls as "monads," which monads, he taught, are the animating and formative principles of all that exists. There are monads of the sun and of the stars. "I should be little surprised," said Goethe, "if thousands of years hence I should meet with this Wieland as the monad of a world, as a star of the first magnitude." The monads are constantly transmigrating. "I am certain," he continued, "that as you see me here I have existed a thousand times already, and I have good

hope of coming back a thousand times more." The conception of the soul's retaining its personality seems to be here excluded; though Goethe had said before, that "how much or how little of its personality* is worthy to endure, is a question and a point to be left to God." Of the monads some are powerful, and form the "monads of worlds, souls of worlds"; others are weak, such as "monads of ants, souls of ants." "The more powerful draw into their sphere all that approaches them," — including weaker monads, — "and convert it into something appertaining to themselves, as into a human body, a plant, an animal, or, still higher, into a star." Inferior monads thus absorbed become monads of parts of the body formed, subject to the chief monad. Thus there are monads of the hands and fingers, which in playing on the piano-forte are compelled to labor for the gratification of the chief monad, not their own. The forms in which the monads clothe themselves are often but imperfectly developed, and may be called *larvæ*. Such are the forms of the

* *Persönlichkeit;* — not "individual existence," as rendered by Mrs. Austin; — but the alteration is unimportant as regards the expression of any meaning; for it is as much without meaning to speak of a *partial* preservation of individual existence, as to speak of personality as being partially retained.

lower animals. "The annihilation of a monad is not to be thought of; but the danger of its being intercepted by a more powerful, but at the same time a meaner monad, is a serious consideration," — an apprehension which, as Goethe says, his observation of nature, on which his whole speculation is professedly founded, could not enable him entirely to put aside. While thus speaking, he was interrupted by the repeated barking of a dog in the street. He flew to the window, and called out: — "Take what shape you will, larva, you shall not master me!" *

This discourse of Goethe on the immortality of the soul was delivered when he was in a solemn and philosophical mood. The same cannot be said of another passage of his conversation preserved by Eckermann. This latter was occasioned by some mention of Tiedge's Urania, a religious poem. "I have had to suffer," he said, "not a little from Tiedge's Urania; for there was a time when nothing else was sung or declaimed. Wherever you went,

* The lot to which the weaker monads or souls are exposed may remind one of Pope's description of some "vile straw that 's blown about the streets"; —

"now loose, now fast,
And carried off in some dog's tail at last."

you found the Urania upon every table. The Urania and immortality were the topics of every conversation. I would by no means dispense with the happiness of believing in a future continuance of being; nay, I would say with Lorenzo de' Medici, that all those are dead even for this life who hope for no other; but such incomprehensible things lie too far off to become an object of daily consideration and of speculation which confounds us. . . . . I found stupid women, who were proud of believing in immortality with Tiedge; and I was obliged to submit to be examined by many of them on this point in a very conceited manner. But I scandalized them by saying I could be well content, that after the close of this life we should be blessed with another, but I would beg not to have there for companions any who had believed in it here. For in that case, what vexation would await me! The pious would come round me and say, Were we not in the right? Did we not predict it? Has it not happened? And so there too I should be bored without end. — It is for the higher classes, and especially for women of quality, who have nothing to do, to busy themselves with ideas of immortality. But an able man, who thinks that there is something to be done here, and who, there-

fore, has every day to strive, to fight, and to work, leaves the future world to itself, and is active and useful in the present. Ideas of immortality, moreover, are for such as have not attained the best fortune here; and I would wager that if the good Tiedge had had better luck, he would have had better thoughts." *

The loose, disjointed talk of the passages I have quoted, the irreligious flippancy of the last, the ignorance or disregard of the actual condition of mankind, few of whom "attain the best fortune here," and the insensibility to the character and wants of all who aim at something better than leading an animal and worldly life, were characteristic of Goethe, and through him infected that literature of which he was for a long time the central orb. It was a literature suited to the low state of society by which it was produced and admired, and to the wants and tastes of a people to whom any form of intellectual refinement in their own language was a novelty. It was a literature from which the influence of religion was excluded. We may hardly at once comprehend how much is expressed by those words. But

* Gespräche mit Goethe (2d ed., Leipsic, 1837), Vol. I. pp. 120–122.

with the conceptions derived from religion, as affecting the heart or the imagination, regarded either as true, or as what may be true, are connected all that gives nobleness and moral beauty to the character of man, — all that is at once earnest, genuine, and disinterested in his affections toward his fellow-men, — the sentiments which have their origin in his spiritual nature, and the motives which cannot be resolved into natural impulses, or modifications of selfishness. To one who has withdrawn himself from the influence of religion, the spiritual world is annihilated. Infinity and eternity become of no concern to him. His view is contracted to what lies about him in this world. All that is venerable and holy disappears; and the substitute offered for it is what has been called "Hero Worship." Nothing true to our higher nature was to be expected from the literature which excluded all consideration of our higher nature. It was of the earth, earthy.

The influence of Goethe and of the literature to which he gave its tone may be inferred from the constituents of his character. He was a thoroughly selfish man; seeking his own gratifications, and caring for others only as his followers, admirers, or patrons, as those who might in some way contribute to his celebrity,

rank, or means of self-indulgence. He had, as appears from his autobiography, little feeling even for such as had been most foolishly or most improperly connected with him, except so far as the expression of their sufferings might annoy him. He was an Epicurean, not such as we may imagine Atticus, the friend of Cicero, or Epicurus himself in his little garden at Athens, but according to the less refined habits of a small German court. His admirer, Falk, tells us that he commonly avoided all conversation respecting "super-sensible" topics, "perfectly," as Falk believed, "on principle, since, conformably to his natural inclinations, he preferred to confine himself to the present and to the lovely appearances which art and nature afford to the eyes and the contemplation in spheres which are accessible to us."

Goethe's view was confined to this world, and to its apparent interests. He did not regard men as spiritual beings. With such a character one cannot estimate nor understand what is morally excellent in others, nor the capacity of such excellence. He cannot be wise in his knowledge of mankind, nor exercise a beneficial influence on his readers. He sees only a small part of human nature, and that the inferior part of it. He can neither deline-

ate it truly as it exists, nor contribute to its advancement. Thus it is that the personages whom Goethe introduces into his works of fiction have no power over the sympathy of an honest mind. No one out of the class which he has influenced can feel an interest in the characters or the fate of Werther, or Wilhelm Meister, or Faust. His personages do not appear as real, living beings, acting and speaking from natural motives, but as theatrical puppets moved by wires, whose voice is at once recognized as that of the prompter. The philosophy of life (as it has been called), which runs through his works, is baseless and vague; often put forth with an oracular obscurity, which serves at once to impose on a credulous worshipper, and to veil from others what might appear to them as commonplaces, or *niaiseries*. In his writings there is no expression of genuine religious principle or sentiment. They contain much which is irreverent and profane; though what bears this character is marked more by a pagan deadness of feeling, than by a spirit of hostility to religion. They recommend, directly or indirectly, nothing pure or high in morals, but are worldly, licentious, and indecent, often addressed to the coarser part of man's nature, dealing with common notions of

duty as belonging to a "sickly religiousness" (*kränkliche Religiosität*), and thus preparing the way, at least, for that school which has signalized itself by teaching the doctrine of the "Emancipation of the Flesh," * — a doctrine the character of which is indicated by its name.

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* See in the Conversations-Lexikon der Gegenwart (1838) the article entitled *Emancipation des Fleisches*. By those who know the character of the writings of Henri Heine, the spirit of this article may be judged of from a remark of its writer, that "Heine was the first who decidedly uttered the Gospel of the Emancipation of the Flesh."

In a book ("Uncle Tom's Cabin"), which, to the honor of our community, has been read by many thousands among us, it is said: — "The gift to appreciate and the sense to feel the finer shades and relations of moral things often seems an attribute [seem to be attributes] of those whose whole life shows a careless disregard of them. Hence, Moore, Byron, Goethe, often speak words more wisely descriptive of the true religious sentiment, than another man whose whole life is governed by it." — On Moore and Byron I have no remark to make. In minds of a higher order, however bewildered or corrupted, the recognition of the higher nature of man is likely to show itself in some form or other; but I am not aware of any such manifestations in the writings of Goethe; — of any thing affecting or elevating as an expression of religious or moral sentiment. There is in his Faust what his admirers have called a "pregnant," "a sublime and celebrated passage," though at the same time describing it as altogether of a "pantheistical tendency and character," * in which Goethe is supposed by them to express his own sentiments concerning the belief of a God. It is put into the mouth of Faust, as addressed by him to the poor, simple girl whom he had debauched through the instigation of

* Falk's Goethe, p. 77. Characteristics of Goethe, I. 93, 267, 269.

His countrymen have complained of Goethe, that, in the fearful struggle in which Europe was engaged during his lifetime, he had no feeling for Germany, no patriotism; that his voice was not heard. But the complaint should have been expressed in more general terms. His indifference to the condition of Germany was only a branch of his indifference to the

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Mephistopheles. Its doctrine is incongruous, being, first, that the name of God may be given to the incomprehensible power that surrounds us, and then that it may be given to the feeling which the contemplation of this power produces: —

> " Fill thy heart with it, large as it is,
> And when thou art wholly blest in the feeling,
> Then name it what thou wilt,
> Name it happiness, heart, love, God.
> I have no name for it,
> Feeling is all."

Faust had just before, in a discourse with Mephistopheles, expressed his feeling toward the unhappy woman in a very coarse manner: —

> " Nenne nicht das schöne Weib!
> Bring' die Begier zu ihrem süssen Leib
> Nicht wieder vor die halb verrückten Sinnen! "

In the line, " Name it happiness, heart, love, God," instead of " love," another word is required to preserve consistency of meaning, — a word for which love is sometimes used as synonymous by writers of this class.

In speaking of the opposite spirit with which different kinds of literature may be imbued, the book I have mentioned will furnish an example. One capable of estimating its merit will dwell little

condition of the world, so long as it did not affect him. During the sack of Weimar, the French commander had a guard placed round his house.*

Upon some occasion, when Falk was discoursing of Goethe, as "floating with sublime indifference above the sport of the world," Herder interrupted him with a speech, which he has recorded, apparently without comprehend-

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on its imperfections and oversights, though he may regret that toward the conclusion it is marred by incidents and characters such as belong to an ordinary novel, and not to the real picture of actual life which is presented in far the greater part of the narrative. It is a work of uncommon power: but its power, though we may admire the genius shown in it, rests on the solid foundation of moral truth. The mind of the writer is guided by that strong sense of right and wrong which invigorates the intellect scarcely less than the affections. Her book is true to human nature in the manifold phases of it which she brings before us, and true in its presentation of human duties in their relation to the whole of man's existence, — true, to use her own words, to "a life which, once believed in, stands as a solemn, significant figure before the otherwise unmeaning ciphers of time." It belongs to a very different class of literature from any thing produced in the school of Goethe, — to one far nobler and more perceptive.

* The same year (1806), induced by his "respect for the moral law of marriage," as one of his biographers says, he married in his fifty-seventh year a woman who had long been his mistress; and, during the interval between the sack of Weimar and the expulsion of Bonaparte from Germany, he gave his time to the study of natural science, especially to his work on optics, which was to overturn the theory of Newton, and to the composition of the most licentious of his novels, his "Elective Affinities."

ing its truth or its terrible severity: — "This is all very well. But whether a man should here mount to that region where pictured and real sufferings become the same to him, where he ceases to be a man, though not to be an artist, where the light only shines, but neither warms nor quickens, and whether these maxims, if received, would not produce a general depravation of character, — this is another question." He compares such men to Nero, who played on the lyre after setting fire to Rome, regarding it as a splendid picture, and pleased himself with tasteful designs for rebuilding it. "What did it concern Nero's architect that the tears of women and children were flowing in the burning city? That is an old story. . . . . We are artists, gods, Neros." *

The philosophy of Germany gave still another character to the popular literature of Germany. It transferred to it its obscurity. In reading many works, equally in one department as the other, a mist seems to gather over our eyes. We discern strange appearances, but not with a distinct outline. Of this Goethe is again a prominent example. It was his pleasure to be regarded as a mysterious writer, full

* Falk's Goethe, pp. 142 - 144.

of hidden meanings. He addressed the "presentiment" rather than the understanding of his readers. Of Wilhelm Meister it is said by an admirer: — "What Goethe intended in it remains a mystery. . . . . Nevertheless Meister must ever be considered one of Goethe's most admirable works, for in that and in Faust are combined all the universality of his genius." * Of Faust it is said: — "The mysterious depth of this great poem, in which the world is reflected, gave occasion to many explanations differing from one another, and to the most opposite views; and both mysticism and the contrary doctrine of Hegel were believed to be reproduced in it." † "Faust," said Goethe himself, "is altogether something incommensurable, and all attempts to bring it nearer to the understanding are vain. . . . . But this very obscurity excites men, and they labor upon it, as upon all insolvable problems." ‡ "We must not," says one of his reviewers, "look for Goethe's life in his autobiography. His entire life is in his works. They are so many different reflexes of different states of his own outer and inner being. . . . . He might have revealed

* Characteristics of Goethe, III. 233, 234.

† Conversations-Lexikon (1834), Art. *Göthe.*

‡ Eckermann, II. 170.

himself more distinctly; but mystery was with him the object of a sort of reverence, or the result of a system." * His friend, Von Müller, in a eulogy delivered upon him after his death, says: — "From his love of secrecy [in common affairs] proceeded his not less ruling inclination to the enigmatical, which not unfrequently is an obstacle to the enjoyment of his writings. This inclination formed itself in him into deliberate maxims. I have heard him often maintain, that a work of art, especially a poem, which leaves nothing to divine, is not a true work, is nothing thoroughly worthy; that its highest purpose ever is to rouse to reflection; and that it can become truly a favorite with the spectator or reader only when it forces him to interpret it according to his own mode of thinking, and, as it were, to complete and make it over again." †

Hence Goethe has been called "the most suggestive of writers." A suggestive writer is one who presents some important truth in a clear light, which is reflected from other truths connected with it, and brings them into view; not one who perplexes his readers by involving them in attempts to solve his meaning, or to de-

* Characteristics of Goethe, III. 40.

† Goethe in seiner ethischen Eigenthümlichkeit (1832), p. 19.

termine whether he has any. Suggestions give light, not darkness. A suggestive writer conducts us to a point of view from which we can see what was before hidden from us, without its being expressly pointed out by him. A writer who has a strong tendency to the enigmatical carries us upon a barren heath where different footpaths present themselves, and suggests that one or other may lead us right. The affectation of profoundness is a common disguise of poverty or want of thought.

Among the evils of which the German school of speculation has been at once the sign and the cause, unintelligible writing, if not one of the greatest, has been one of the most obvious. We find it in every form, — in professed works of disquisition, and in professed works of sentiment, pervading masses of metaphysics, and spreading an uncertain light over immoral novels. This unmeaning use of language indicates and corresponds to great confusion of thought. It is one result of the want of settled principles, and of the anarchical and ever-varying state of opinion, which are characteristics of our times. It affords no ready means of conviction; for it is hard to convince of error those who do not understand themselves, who are without any definite purpose but a negative

or destructive one, who have no distinct and fixed meaning, but whose pretended meaning disappears in proportion as you give an intelligible sense to the words which they use. Perspicuity is the great enemy of error. Commonly, a false opinion, when stated in plain words, either reveals its character, or can easily be shown to be what it is. When one is bewildered by obscurity of style, there is a strong presumption against the value of any meaning that may be put upon the words. He who writes what is worth reading must think clearly; and it is a rare case that he who thinks clearly wants the ability to express himself intelligibly.

From a literature lying out of the light of religion, all the sources of the highest beauty and interest were excluded; all those belonging to our spiritual and more excellent nature. It was necessarily conversant with meaner objects, with the palpable and familiar things of vulgar life, with the ordinary passions of men, to which there is often an attempt to give interest by a strong seasoning of licentiousness, or by exaggeration and extravagance, or by exhibiting them in combinations which have no counterpart in nature. Hence followed a general depravation of taste, a confinement of its sphere,

a belittling of its character. The terms of praise, terms which have passed into our own language, became the words "æsthetic" and "artistic," neither of them expressive of moral feeling, the first being used to signify very little or nothing more than "agreeable as a work of art," and the other denoting only the skill of the artist. A person very intimately connected with Goethe once remarked, that "he was not an artist; for he was conscious of moral preferences." The consequent deficiencies and offences in German literature have been such, that, though there are many translations from it into our own language, there are but few works which have secured the permanent regard of English readers.*

* To attempt to illustrate these remarks by exemplifications would lead us much too far; but I am induced to give one illustration, which is to be found in the last chapter of the third edition of Strauss's noted work (it is omitted in the fourth edition), — especially as the passage has a bearing on various topics which have been adverted to. Strauss, after laboring to show that there is very little to be credited in the history of our Lord, as all that is miraculous is to be unhesitatingly rejected, and to reduce him to little more than a mythical or allegorical personage, takes in this concluding chapter a new position, as being in some sort a Christian, and asserts that Christ, as the founder of Christianity, ranks above the other founders of different religions. Such is the fact, he says, so far as regards the past; but whether this superiority will continue is another question. In the discussion of it, which it

Thus we have seen something of the character and effects of German theology, connected as it was with German speculation on all related subjects. I use the epithet not invidiously, but because all its most distinguishing peculiarities, in matter and form, were fully developed in Germany, were not received there from abroad, but have made their way thence elsewhere. This they continue to do, even while they are dying out on their native soil, and leaving only their calamitous effects behind. I have spoken particularly of De Wette, not from any intellectual superiority on his part, but because he is a favorable specimen of a large class of German theologians, and one of those best known out of Germany. But, excepting out of Germany, there are now, I believe, very few

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is not worth while to attempt to make intelligible, Strauss cites examples of great men, — such as Cæsar and Bonaparte, — the earlier of whom in point of time have been excelled by the later, not through any superiority of individual qualities, but because their successors lived in a more advanced state of the world. Thus Shakspeare stands higher than Homer or Sophocles "because he wrought upon a more developed *consciousness* of humanity, and had to solve deeper, or, at least, more complicated problems; — as again, in this same respect, Goethe is above Shakspeare." — Shakspeare and Goethe! The comparison is between Prospero, with his wand of power, controlling the spirits of the elements, and Mephistopheles drawing infernal wine by boring holes in a wooden table with a gimlet.

who would regard his name as any authority, or consult his works for guidance in regard to the character of religion.

I SHALL now illustrate this theology still further from the most celebrated and popular work of one who was in his day, perhaps, the most distinguished of its leaders, though in the interval since his death, in 1834, his celebrity and influence among his countrymen have declined as rapidly as De Wette's. I mean SCHLEIERMACHER.

IT is now fifty-three years since Schleiermacher first published his "Discourses on Religion." * In a tone of pretension very foreign

* "Ueber die Religion." — This work was originally published in 1799, when the author was thirty years old. In 1806, a second edition appeared, in the Dedication of which the author professes to have revised it throughout, for the purpose, among others, of removing all occasion for the gross misunderstandings to which it had been exposed, causing him to be represented as a fanatic by infidels, and an unbeliever by bigots. In 1821, a third edition was published, again revised, with many changes of expression, and accompanied with copious notes, to explain more fully the writer's opinions. And in 1831, three years before his death, a fourth edition was issued, being that which I use. In the Preface to the third edition (which is retained, without any additional notice, in the fourth), he again refers to "the numerous and in part very wonderful misconceptions" of his meaning, and to the consequent

from the common character of intelligent men, he professes to have written it, not "through any determination of his judgment," but through "a divine call," a "heavenly impulse." It is a system of pantheism, wrought up in a highly declamatory style, in which the language often soars beyond meaning, and in which there is scarcely an attempt at what may be called reasoning. Religion, according to him, is the sense of the union of the individual with the universe, with Nature, or, in the language of the sect, with the One and All.* It is a feeling; it has nothing to do with belief or action; † it is unconnected with morality; their provinces are different; ‡ it is independent of the idea of a personal God. § The idea of a personal God is pure mythology. ‖ And the belief and desire of personal immortality are "wholly irreligious," as being opposed to that

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charges of atheism and mysticism which had been brought against him "almost in the same breath." One would think that it must be felt as a great misfortune by a writer earnest to propagate what he thinks the truth concerning religion to be unable to express himself intelligibly, and, in consequence, to be grossly misapprehended, and to be charged with unbelief and fanaticism, with atheism and mysticism.

* See particularly pp. 48, seqq.

† Pp. 53, 54.

‡ Pp. 21, seqq.

§ Pp. 110, seqq.

‖ P. 59.

which is the aim of religion, "the annihilation of one's own personality," "the living in the One and All," "the becoming, as far as possible, one with the universe." * The writer whom I have quoted partook of the sacrament on his death-bed, as a Christian. We may have a striking apprehension of the relation in which his system stands to Christianity, if we imagine the words of Jesus struck out from the Gospels, and his teachings substituted in their stead.

Schleiermacher introduces into his work a glowing eulogy on Spinoza. It is an elaborate specimen of his eloquence. "Reverently," he apostrophizes, "offer with me a lock of hair to the manes of the holy, the proscribed Spinoza. Him the high World-spirit pervaded; the infinite was his beginning and end, the universe his only and eternal love; in holy innocence and deep humility he beheld himself mirrored in the eternal world, and saw how he too was its loveliest mirror. Full of religion was he, and full of a holy spirit, and hence he stands alone and unapproached, master in his art, but raised above the profane fraternity, without apprentices and without burghership." †

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* Pp. 118, seqq.

† Ueber die Religion, pp. 47, 48.

Cousin, who may be reckoned as belonging to the German school of metaphysicians and theologists, likewise pronounces a panegyric on Spinoza; but it looks pale by the side of Schleiermacher's. I will quote a few sentences: — "The book of Spinoza, all bristling as it is after the fashion of his time with geometrical formulæ, — so dry and so repulsive in its style, — is at the bottom a mystic hymn, a soaring and longing of the spirit directed toward Him who alone is authorized to say, I AM THAT I AM. . . . . Spinoza is an Indian yogi, a Persian sufi, an enthusiastic monk; and the author whom this pretended atheist most resembles is the unknown author of the 'Imitation of Jesus Christ.'" * Elsewhere, however, he says that, according to the doctrine of Spinoza, "God can be only a substance, and not a cause, — the perfect being, infinite, necessary, the immutable substance of the universe, and not its producing and creating cause." † This language is very inaccurate; for Spinoza repeats often, that God is the only cause of all things, teaching as a fundamental doctrine that the "substance of

* Fragments Philosophiques. Œuvres (Bruxelles, 1841), Tom. II. p. 178.

† Cours de l'Histoire de la Philosophie, 11me Leçon. Œuvres, Tom. I. p. 218.

the universe," which alone has an independent existence, produces all finite beings as their immanent cause, — that is, as I shall hereafter explain, produces them from itself. But he also teaches, as we shall likewise see, that this substance, or God, as it is called in his vocabulary, produces them without purpose, having no providence over them. The absurdity of supposing a mystic, devotional hymn, the enthusiastic breathing forth of the spirit, to be addressed to such a being either as Spinoza conceived of, or as Cousin reports him to have conceived of, is, perhaps, not aggravated by representing this hymn as composed in *geometrical formulæ*, whatever may be the meaning of those words. But this mistake is not the only fundamental error respecting the system of Spinoza that appears in the passage from which I have last quoted. Cousin says, that "in Spinoza's philosophy man and nature are only pure phenomena, simple *attributes* of the only and absolute substance," and repeatedly uses the word "attribute" in a similar manner. But by an "attribute" Spinoza explains himself as meaning that which constitutes the essence of a substance. According to him, the only attributes of the one substance of the universe, his God, which are comprehensible by man, are in-

finite extension and infinite thought. These are not finite things; man and nature are not these attributes, as Cousin asserts. But all finite things are, according to Spinoza, modes of these attributes. Between these modes which constitute finite things, and the attributes which constitute the infinite substance, Spinoza of course makes a wide distinction. Perhaps, however, the doctrine is no more an object of the understanding in its proper form, as it appears in Spinoza, than in that in which it is presented by Cousin. To illustrate the difference between them by a particular example, — according to Cousin, the sun, a finite thing, is, in Spinoza's system, an attribute of God; according to Spinoza himself, it is a mode of infinite extension, which is one attribute of the universal substance; for the other attribute, infinite thought, is out of the question.

Before the time when German speculation began to flourish, Spinoza had been almost forgotten. His works had never been collected, and were separately difficult to be procured. But in the last quarter of the last century his fame began to revive in Germany, it spread rapidly, and his influence on German metaphysics and German infidel theology soon became very great, and generally recognized. Within four

years after Schleiermacher's eulogy, Paulus, another German theologian of about equal note, published the first edition of his collected works (in 1802–3). In the preface to the second volume he says, that "the superstitious and ridiculous horror of the atheism, so called, of Spinoza, was shaken off by his countrymen earlier than by the intelligent elsewhere." To deny the atheism of Spinoza is merely to deny that the word is to be used in its common and established sense, as expressive of disbelief in an intelligent and designing Creator.

In 1830 a writer named Gfrörer (I speak of him thus, because, though he has written much, I suppose his name is familiar to very few of my readers) put forth another edition of Spinoza's collected works; and in 1843 another cheap edition, edited by Bruder, was stereotyped at the press of Tauchnitz. Gfrörer, in speaking of Spinoza, emulates the lofty tone of Schleiermacher. He says, among other things: — "Should you consider the force of his genius, you may scarce regard him as a man, but as some new nature, which by itself alone effected all which might be effected by the joint efforts of the forces of a thousand mortals. You might equal him to an age; for during a period, now of almost two centuries, what

advance has been made in philosophy, in which he did not lead the way and break the road? or what improvement has there been in theology, which was not derived from his storehouses?" * "In treating sacred history who was more acute, and more free from all the prejudices which his own age not only defended, but madly cherished; so that to this day whatever sound doctrine has been promulgated on this subject appears to have had its source in the writings of Spinoza?" † "Spinoza maintained that the universe, or the eternity of the laws which operate in the world, is God; and this doctrine very many affirm to be most gloomy and horrible, as it seems to be inconsistent with Divine Providence and the special care and love of God for pious men. But let them consider how calm and how cheerful Spinoza always lived. . . . . And in truth nothing can be called gloomy or cheerful except under some particular relation, and it may well be, that what seems dreadful to one may be most agreeable to another who judges the thing differently." ‡

What is said in such passages concerning the atheistic, or, if any one prefer the word, panthe-

* Præfat. p. vi. † Ibid. p. viii. ‡ Ibid. pp. ix., x.

istic, doctrine of Spinoza may be offensive to our feelings, but in the present state of opinion it is well they should be written. It is desirable that the nature of the discussion with the later speculatists of Germany and those of the same school elsewhere should be distinctly and generally understood; that it should be made as evident as it has been made, that the question at issue is, whether there is or is not any ground for the existence of religion among men.

Bruder does not profess himself to be so enthusiastic an admirer of Spinoza as some of those whom I have quoted. He mentions the declaration of Lessing, that "there is no other philosophy but the philosophy of Spinoza"; he speaks of his influence on the principal German metaphysicians subsequent to Kant; he quotes at length Schleiermacher's eulogy upon him, and then remarks, that "it is not strange that at the present day, when there is the most eager discussion of philosophical subjects, and of the weightiest questions in politics and literature, the philosophy of Spinoza should be brought forward and cultivated with new ardor as a primary source, and even that particular courses of lectures on his doctrine should be delivered in some of the universities of our coun-

try." "The credit of Spinoza," he says, "began to prevail when, in the beginning of the nineteenth century, Schelling and Hegel at last inclined to many of his opinions, each according to his own system, so that he may be accounted the source of the philosophy of our age." *

Such being the influence of Spinoza on modern German metaphysics and theology, it is necessary to a just conception of them to have some acquaintance with his leading doctrines, and his manner of thinking and writing.

According to Spinoza there is but one substance existing.† All the phenomena of what

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* Præfat. pp. iii., iv., xix.

† To this substance Spinoza repeatedly ascribes "infinite attributes." In the sixth of the Definitions with which he commences his Ethics, he says: — "By God I understand an absolutely infinite being, that is, a substance consisting of infinite attributes." In the First Part of this work he speaks of *all* the attributes of God, and uses other expressions implying more than a duality of attributes. But one would not in consequence be justified in stating that the ascription of infinite attributes to the one substance of the universe made a part of Spinoza's system. His language appears to be used either through confusion of mind, or in accommodation to the common belief concerning the attributes of God, whose name he has transferred to the infinite substance. Whatever he may have asserted in general terms, Spinoza expressly states that but two attributes of this substance can be known by man, — one, infinite extension (extension being considered by him as the essence of matter), and the other, infinite thought (thought being considered by him as the essence of all thinking beings).

we call the created universe — that is, all finite beings, with their properties, acts, and affections; with their moral qualities, good or bad; with their joys and sufferings, — are but modes or modifications of the attributes of this sole substance, or, in other words, of this substance itself. This substance has existed without beginning. It could be produced by no other; for one substance cannot produce another; — creation is impossible.* It is "the *immanent* cause of all things, not a *transitive* cause." † These terms are technical, and require explanation. An *immanent* cause is that which produces effects only in or upon itself. A *transitive* cause is that which passes out of itself, as it were, to produce, or to act on, something else.‡

These two attributes only are specified in his Ethics; the consideration of these alone, with their "modes," enters into his system; on these two attributes that system wholly rests, and that these alone can be known he affirms in his sixty-sixth Letter, where, after discussing the subject, he says: — "And so I conclude that the human mind can attain a knowledge of no attribute of God except these." — Opp. I. 673, 674, ed. Paulus.

* These principles are stated in the first fifteen Propositions of the First Part of his Ethics, in which Part he treats of God.

† Ethices P. I. Prop. 18. Opp. II. 54.

‡ "Causa immanens dicitur, quæ producit effectum in seipsâ. . . . . Causa transiens dicitur, quæ producit effectum extra se." Burgersdicii Institut. Metaphys. The words were in common use in these senses by the scholastic writers before and after the time of Spinoza.

The sole substance of the universe is the God of Spinoza.

To this substance, considered in itself, distinct from the effects produced by it in itself, and as the cause of those effects, he gives the name also of *Natura naturans*, which may be explained by the equivalent term, *causal Nature;* while to the modifications produced by it in itself, that is, to the phenomena of the universe, he gives the name of *Natura naturata*, for which we may substitute *phenomenal Nature.**

To this substance considered in itself, to his *Natura naturans*, that is, to his God, *regarded*

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* As this is an important point in his theory, I quote the passage at length in which he explains his views : —

" Antequam ulterius pergam, hic, quid nobis per Naturam naturantem et quid per Naturam naturatam intelligendum sit, explicare volo, vel potius monere. Nam ex antecedentibus jam constare existimo, nempe, quod per Naturam naturantem nobis intelligendum est id, quod in se est et per se concipitur, sive talia substantiæ attributa, quæ æternam et infinitam essentiam exprimunt, hoc est, Deus, quatenus, ut causa libera, consideratur. Per Naturatam autem intelligo id omne, quod ex necessitate Dei naturæ, sive uniuscujusque Dei attributorum sequitur, hoc est, omnes Dei attributorum modos, quatenus considerantur, ut res, quæ in Deo sunt et quæ sine Deo nec esse, nec concipi possunt." — Ethices P. I. Prop. 29, Schol., pp. 61, 62.

By *causa libera* Spinoza means nothing more than a cause unconstrained by any other; as he explains in the demonstration of the seventeenth Proposition of the First Part, and in the corollaries to it, pp. 51, 52.

as the cause of all things, he expressly denies both intellect and will, and argues at length against ascribing them to God. "I will show," he says, "that neither intellect nor will belongs to the nature of God." *

"If intellect and will belong to the eternal essence of God," says Spinoza, reasoning against the supposition, "certainly something must be understood by each attribute different from what men commonly mean. For the intellect and will which would constitute the essence of God must differ entirely from our intellect and will; nor could there be any correspondence between them except in name; that is, no other correspondence than exists between the constellation called the Dog, and a dog a barking animal; which I will thus prove." †

The purpose of Spinoza is to prove that we cannot ascribe intellect and will to the Deity in any intelligible sense of the words, in any sense in which we use them, and therefore that it is irrational to ascribe them to the Deity at all. He gives the following as the conclusion of his reasoning: — "Therefore the intellect of God, so far as it is conceived of as constituting the

* "Ostendam, ad Dei naturam neque intellectum, neque voluntatem pertinere." — Ibid. Prop. 17, Schol., p. 52.

† Ibid. p. 53.

divine essence," that is, so far as it is conceived of as an essential attribute of God,* "differs from our intellect both as respects its essence and existence, and can agree with it in nothing but in name, which it was my purpose to prove." It was of course the purpose of Spinoza to prove ultimately the proposition which he had laid down at the commencement of his argument, that "neither intellect nor will belongs to the nature of God."

But though the denial of intellect to the Deity is a fundamental characteristic of the system of Spinoza, there are other positions in his system which seem, at first view, irreconcilable with it. As I have before observed, Spinoza supposes that but two attributes of his God can be known by man, and these are infinite extension and *infinite thought.* In the Second Part of his Ethics, (in which it is to be noted that he is professedly treating, not of God, but of the human mind,) his first Proposition is: — "Thought is an attribute of God; or God is a thinking thing," *res cogitans*, — which strange expression should be remarked. He says that God understands or knows himself, *seipsum*

* In the fourth of his Definitions (Part I.) he says: — "By an attribute I understand that which the intellect perceives concerning a substance as constituting its essence."

*intelligit.** He repeatedly speaks, in this Part and elsewhere, of the intellect of God. He says that "God loves himself with infinite intellectual love." † And what is remarkable, he makes no express attempt to reconcile these apparent contradictions. But the solution which he does afford, without expressly recognizing the contradiction, is altogether consistent with his denying intellect to God, considered as the cause of all things.

This solution I shall first state in my own words, thus: — All nature, the universe considered as an effect, consists only of infinite modes or modifications of the one infinite substance, the God of Spinoza. But whatever may be affirmed of the modes or modifications of any being, taken collectively, may be affirmed of that being itself. *Phenomenal Nature* (Natura naturata) is as truly God as *causal Nature.* Now in the infinite universe there are infinite thought and intellect, and a knowledge or understanding of God (for according to Spinoza, there is nothing else to be known or understood but God ‡); and all this may be predicated of God,

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* Ethices P. II. Prop. 3, Schol., et alibi.

† Ibid. P. V. Prop. 35.

‡ "Intellectus actu finitus, aut actu infinitus, Dei attributa Deique affectiones comprehendere debet et nihil aliud." — Ethices P.

considered, not as a cause, but as *phenomenal Nature*. I shall now quote to this effect the words of Spinoza himself.

"*Actual* intellect," he says, that is, intellect actually existing,* "whether finite or infinite, as also will, desire, love, &c., must be referred to *phenomenal Nature* (ad Naturam naturatam), not to *causal Nature* (non vero ad naturantem).†

I. Prop. 30. Spinoza here, as commonly, uses *debet* in the sense of *must*, as implying logical necessity.

I add the forty-seventh Proposition of the Second Part (p. 120): "Mens humana adæquatam habet cognitionem æternæ et infinitæ essentiæ Dei."

* In scholastic language the terms *actual* and *potential* existence are used technically. A being is said to exist *actually* when it really exists; to exist *potentially*, when it does not really exist, but its existence is possible. Thus, for example, the rose lying on the table before me has *actual* existence; the same rose, last winter, had *potential* existence, or, in other words, its existence was *possible*. The term *actual* is expressed in scholastic Latin by *actu*, *in actu*, (*existens* being understood,) or *actualis*, and *potential* in a similar manner by *potentiâ*, *in potentiâ*, or *potentialis*. Thus it is said: — "Per essentiam Ens est id quod est, et per existentiam actu est quicquid actu atque extra suas causas est." "Esse potentiâ est posse existere, ut tamen actu non existat."

In a scholium Spinoza remarks that he uses the term *intellectus actu*, that his meaning may be perfectly clear; not because he allows the existence of any potential intellect (*non est quia concedo ullum dari intellectum potentiâ*); — that is, he does not allow the possibility of the existence of any intellect in the universe but what does exist.

† Ethices P. I. Prop. 31, p. 62.

This ascribing of intellect to *phenomenal* and not to *causal Nature* is a main point in the system of Spinoza; and from ignorance of it, or inattention to it, I suppose his doctrine concerning God to have been often misunderstood. I shall, therefore, produce other passages to the same effect as that just quoted.

"Will and intellect have the same relation to God as motion and rest, and generally as all natural phenomena (*omnia naturalia*), which are necessarily determined by God to exist and operate in a certain manner. . . . . .

"Will does not more pertain to the nature of God than other natural phenomena, but has the same relation to it as motion and rest, and as all other natural phenomena." *

That is, will and intellect may be affirmed of God only as motion and rest may be affirmed of him; that is, only of God considered as *Natura naturata*, phenomenal Nature.

In the Second Part of his Ethics there are many passages that involve the main idea of the following.

"A knowledge of whatever takes place in the human mind necessarily exists in God, so

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* Ibid. Prop. 32, Coroll. 2, pp. 63, 64.

far as he constitutes the nature of the human mind." *

Though the expression of the following passage is in some respects obscure, it is clear as regards our present purpose.

"It appears that our mind, considered as intelligent, is an eternal mode of thought, which is limited by another eternal mode of thought,† and that again by another, and thus to infinity, so that, altogether, they [that is, human minds, or minds like the human] constitute the eternal and infinite intellect of God." ‡

"I think," he says, in a letter to his disciple De Vries, "that I have clearly and evidently shown that intellect, though infinite, belongs to *phenomenal*, and not to *causal Nature*." §

* P. II. Prop. 12, Demonstr., p. 88. Conf. Prop. 11, Coroll.; Prop. 38, Demonstr.; Prop. 40, Demonstr.; Prop. 43, Demonstr.; P. III. Prop. 1, Demonstr.

† To explain Spinoza's words, "eternal mode of thought," we must recur to the fact, that he regards all human minds as modes or modifications of the eternal and infinite attribute of cogitation or intellect which he ascribes to his God, and as partaking of the eternity of that attribute. "Any thing," he says, "which necessarily follows from the absolute nature of any attribute of God cannot have a determinate duration, but through the same attribute is eternal." — P. I. Prop. 21, Demonstr.

We have passed far beyond the bounds of meaning; but I must advert to this passage hereafter in another connection.

‡ P. V. Prop. 40, Schol., p. 297.

§ Epist. 27. Opp. I. 524.

There is no doubt, therefore, that Spinoza denies to his God, *considered as the cause of all things*, both intellect and will. But he also gave the name of God to what we call the *created* universe, to all finite things regarded collectively, to the *modes* of the infinite substance produced in it by itself, to nature considered as an effect; and to this he ascribes infinite intellect, not as an attribute of a personal being, but meaning by that term the infinite aggregate of intellect which exists in the totality of finite, thinking beings.

The expositors of Spinoza who regard him as an authority in philosophy and religion have been perplexed by his seemingly opposite assertions concerning God as an intelligent being; but have none of them, I believe, proceeded further in reconciling these assertions than one of the latest of their number, Sigwart, who says: — "The contradictions [contradiction] which some at the present day find in the circumstance, that Spinoza on the one side speaks of a self-knowledge of God, of an idea which God has of his being and its necessary consequences, and on the other side places intellect, even infinite intellect, in the sphere of phenomenal Nature, *Natura naturata*, are [is]

not altogether insolvable. . . . . But this is not the place actually to give a solution of it; the less so, because Spinoza himself affords no clew for such a solution." * But without affording any satisfactory, or indeed intelligible, means of reconciling this contradiction, some of his expositors (as Sigwart himself) have attempted to prove that he was not an atheist, by appealing to his declarations that intellect is to be ascribed to the substance or being that he calls God. The solution that I have given of his apparently contradictory language may show in what sense these declarations are to be understood.

As we have already seen,† the doctrine of Spinoza is, that, in ascribing intellect and will to the nature of God, we use words without meaning; that they can express nothing resembling such intellect and will as we are acquainted with, nothing therefore of which we can form a conception. In what follows we shall see that he denies the existence of any intellect or will in God having relation to his creatures, any intellect or will about which they can have any concern.

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* Der Spinozismus historisch und philosophisch erläutert (Tübingen, 1839), pp. 127, 128.

† See before, p. 343.

It is the doctrine of Spinoza, that all the phenomena in the universe are the result of an inevitable necessity; of the necessary operation of the laws of the Divine Nature, or, in other words, of *causal Nature.* Nothing could be otherwise than as it is.* According to him, there is no benevolent purpose in Nature. He denies that his God proposes to himself any purpose, or that there is any plan in the universe.† "Men commonly suppose," he says, "that all things in nature act for some end, like themselves; and even maintain, as indubitable, that God himself directs all things to some certain end." ‡ He first undertakes to explain the origin of this prejudice, and then to prove its falsity. "The prejudice," he says, "has become a superstition, and struck its roots deep into men's minds. Hence every one strives earnestly to understand and explain the final causes of all things. But in endeavoring to show that Nature does nothing in vain (that is, nothing but for the use of men), they seem to have shown only that Nature and the Gods are as foolish as men." § He commences

* Ethices P. I. Prop. 33, pp. 64 seqq.

† P. I. Appendix, pp. 68-76. Conf. P. IV. Præfat. pp. 200, 201.

‡ Appendix, p. 69.

§ Ibid. p. 70.

his second head by saying: "Not many words are necessary to show, that Nature proposes to itself no end, and that all final causes are nothing but human figments." *

"The opinion of those who subject all things to" what Spinoza calls "a certain indifferent will of God, and maintain that all things depend on his good pleasure, is less wide from the truth," he says, "than that of those who maintain that God does all things with reference to good." †

This is the system which has had so powerful an effect on German philosophy and theology, and which lies at the basis of that work of Schleiermacher in which the eulogy of its author is introduced.

"To conceive of the personality of God," says Schleiermacher, "as resembling human personality, commonly implies a *consciousness* which is even morally impure." There is a great difference, according to him, between conceiving of God as having this sort of personality, and believing in a living God. "Every one may be accounted pious who believes in a living God." ‡ Truly religious men have never

* Ethices P. I. Appendix, p. 71.
† P. I. Prop. 33, Schol. 2, p. 67.
‡ Ueber die Religion, p. 141.

been zealous for the conception of the personality of God, "and so far as by atheism is meant, as is often the case, nothing more than a shrinking back from it, and doubt concerning it, a truly pious man will regard the existence of this around him with great indifference." *

In this passage *human* personality is impliedly denied to God. But personality is but of one kind, admitting no modifications or degrees. The word must have the same meaning, whether used of a man, an angel, or the Divinity. To deny *human* personality to God, or personality like that of man, is to deny a personal God. The epithet "human" can serve merely as a blind, or to suggest that it is allowable to use the word "personality" in some sense of which we have no conception.

It is further implied, that God is a living God. There is one sense of the word "living," in which we speak of organic material bodies as living. There is but one other sense, that in which the term is applied to beings capable of perception, possessing mind in some degree or other. Unless it be contended that God is a material organization, it is in the latter class of beings that he must be included.

* Ibid. p. 117.

To apply, then, to him the epithet of *living*, meaning a living being possessed of mind, and to deny his personality, — that is, to deny his consciousness of his own existence, to represent him as utterly passive and powerless, for a being can exercise no power of which he is unconscious, — to bring together these ideas, and all the others connected with them, is to present as gross an absurdity as the mind is capable of entertaining.

Of the new theology Schleiermacher was at one time considered an oracle. In further illustration of its character I will give an extract from him relating to the fundamental doctrine of Christianity, the immortality of man.

"I believe," he says, "that I have fully set before you the manner in which every pious person has within him an unchangeable and eternal existence. For, when our feeling cleaves to nothing individual, but embraces as its sole object our relation to God, in which all that is individual and perishable is swallowed up, then is there nothing perishable in it, but only what is eternal; and it may truly be said, that the religious life is that in which we have already sacrificed and renounced all that is mortal, and actually enjoy immortality. But the manner in which most men conceive of im-

mortality, and their longing after it, appear to me irreligious, and directly contrary to the spirit of piety. Nay, their wish to be immortal has no other ground than an aversion to what is the aim of religion." The great aim of religion, he goes on to say (as I formerly explained his doctrine), is the divesting ourselves of our personality, and the becoming one with the Infinite. But those, he proceeds, who receive the common doctrine of immortality, struggle against this; "they are anxiously concerned about their personality; and thus, far from being willing to seize their only opportunity to rise superior to it, — that afforded them by death, — they are anxious how they shall take it with them beyond this life; and aspire, at most, for eyes of wider vision and better limbs. But God speaks to them, as it is written, 'He who loses his life for my sake will preserve it, and he who would preserve it will lose it.' The life which they would preserve is one not to be preserved. . . . . The more they long after an immortality which is none, and which they are not even capable of conceiving, (for who can succeed in the effort to represent to himself an existence in time as eternal?) the more they lose of that immortality which they might ever possess, and lose with it this mortal life, by in-

dulging thoughts that cause vain anxiety and distress.* . . . . . The aim and character of a religious life is not such an immortality as many wish for and believe in; — or, perhaps, only pretend to believe in; for their desire to know too much of it makes their belief very suspi-

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* Schleiermacher well knew how to *mock with some lip-phrase;* and, conformably to this, he here introduces a passage which it is proper to quote.

"He who has learned to be more than himself knows that he loses little when he loses himself. Only he who, thus renouncing himself, has become blended, as far as in his power, with the whole universe, and in whose soul a greater and holier desire has sprung up, — only he has a right to, and only with him may there really be, any further discourse of those hopes which death gives us, and of the infinity to which we may infallibly raise ourselves through it."

It would be idle to inquire what hopes and what infinity Schleiermacher would hold out to a being whose personal existence is to cease with death.

An expression which I have used above, in connection with the whole subject, brings to my mind a passage of much beauty from a late poem: —

"Is it a boon, when dissolution's strife
Hangs, trembling, o'er the bed of child or wife,
And the poor sufferer turns amid her pain,
And looks, and strives to say, 'We meet again,' —
Is it a boon to stand in anguish by,
And meet with some lip-phrase that clinging eye,
Whilst the sad sceptic heart makes no reply?
Then, bending o'er the tomb to which she sank,
Present to feel — and Future — one mere blank?"

KENYON'S *Rhymed Plea for Tolerance.*

cious; — not that immortality which is out of time and after time, or rather only after the present time, yet still in time; but the immortality which already, in this temporal life, we may immediately possess, and which is a problem in the solution of which we are continually engaged. In the midst of finiteness to become one with the Infinite, and to be eternal in every moment, — that is the immortality of religion." *

Such is the conclusion of Schleiermacher's Discourse on the Essence of Religion. In his note on the passage I have quoted, he says: "I wish nothing more than that every man may see himself, not only divested of all the foreign apparel for which he is indebted to the outward circumstances of life, but also after having laid aside these pretensions to an endless existence; in order that he may determine, when he regards himself such as he really is, whether these pretensions be any thing more than such titles as the mighty of the earth often deck themselves with, to countries which they have never possessed, nor will possess." †

According to Schleiermacher, we may "be

* Ueber die Religion, pp. 118 – 121.

† Ibid. p. 141.

eternal in every moment." This is one of those propositions of such startling absurdity, that they may create a momentary suspicion that some portentous truth is veiled in their darkness. But in this sentence, no truth, literally or figuratively expressed, is to be discovered.

Eternity involves an idea, the idea of infinity, the full comprehension of which transcends the powers of the human mind. We can have no other conception of infinity than as the absence of all limitation. Time without limitation is the only idea we can have of eternity. The proposition, that we may be eternal in every moment, has no other significance than that we may live an unlimited duration in every moment.

The words of this proposition cannot be understood as improperly used in a transitive or figurative signification; for no such signification can be assigned to them. In this, as well as in other passages of the theologians and metaphysicians of the modern school, the word "eternal" is so connected as to show that it requires to be understood as denoting unlimited duration. Here, in the passage before us, the eternal existence which may be enjoyed every moment is directly opposed to the immortality, the never-ending existence, which the Christian

hopes for after death; and the antithesis would be futile if by the eternity to be enjoyed in every moment were signified any thing else than a never-ending existence. Such is the character of the proposition. But we cannot suppose that any man having the use of his reason could enunciate it in the only sense which the significations of its separate words admit. There would be no greater folly in affirming, that, when we occupy any portion of extension, we fill infinite space. It is a *mystical* proposition, put forward in the vain hope that some hazy meaning may gather round it.

This unintelligible abuse of the words "eternal" and "eternity" is derived from Spinoza. According to him, "individual things are nothing but affections or modes of the attributes of God." * They follow necessarily from the nature of God, "and whatever follows necessarily from the absolute nature of any attribute of God cannot have a determinate duration, but through the same attribute is eternal." † He compares individual things to "eternal truths," which have no relation to time. ‡ "If

* Ethices P. I. Prop. 25, Coroll.

† Ibid. Prop. 21, Demonstr.

‡ Ibid. Definit. 8, Explicat., compared with the subsequent references to it in his work. It is perhaps hardly necessary to ob-

we attend to the common opinion of men," he says, "we shall see that they are conscious of the eternity of their minds, but confound eternity with duration, attributing it to the imagination or memory which they believe to remain after death." * And so on, more or less distinctly, in various passages.

The last conspicuous manifestation of the character of the new theology appears in the writings of Strauss. Few products of this theology, I might rather say none, have excited so much attention as his "Life of Jesus, critically treated," — an attack, as has been before mentioned, on the credibility of the Gospels. Toward the end of this work he gives his view of what he calls the Christology, meaning, I suppose, the doctrine concerning Christ. The passage taken as a whole has no meaning, properly speaking, that is, it presents no sequence of ideas which the understanding is capable of receiving, yet it is still a very instructive one, as showing the character of those speculations which had become popular among his readers.

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serve, that, in speaking of *eternal* truths, we use the word in its common acceptation, as meaning what always have been and always will be truths, in contradistinction from such as are true only in reference to particular temporary circumstances.

* Ethices P. V. Prop. 34, Schol.

"The key of the whole Christology," he says, "is this, that the subject of those predicates which the Church ascribes to Christ is not to be regarded as an individual, but as an *Idea;* a real *Idea*, however,—not as, according to Kant, an imaginary one. Considered as existing in an individual, in a God-man, the attributes and offices which the doctrine of the Church ascribes to Christ are inconsistent with each other; in the *Idea* of the species, they agree together. Humanity is the union of the two natures, it is God become man; the Infinite Spirit renouncing its infinity and becoming finite, and the finite spirit conscious of its infinity.* It is the child of the visible mother and the invisible father; of Spirit and of Nature. It is the worker of miracles; inasmuch as, in the prog-

* This language refers to the doctrines of Hegel, whose metaphysical system is of the latest fashion in Germany, and who maintains the unity of Spirit, human and divine, as the element of the universe; or, in the words of Strauss (Vol. II. p. 709), which cannot be rendered into English so as to give a show of meaning; "dass der göttliche Geist in seiner Entäusserung und Erniedrigung der menschliche, und der menschliche in seiner Einkehr in sich und Erhebung über sich der göttliche ist"; "*that the Divine Spirit in its renunciation and abasement is the human, and the human in its withdrawal into itself, and its elevation above itself, is the Divine*"; or, as he elsewhere expresses it, that "God and man are in themselves [essentially] one": "Gott und Mensch an sich sind Eins."

ress of man's history, the spirit is continually obtaining more full mastery over nature, both in man and around him; nature becoming subjected to its activity as a powerless material. Humanity is the sinless; inasmuch as the process of its development is blameless; pollution cleaves only to the individual, but in the species, and in its history, is thrown off. It is Humanity that dies, and rises from the dead, and ascends to heaven; inasmuch as, through the negation of its *naturality* [what in its composition belongs to nature], it is continually attaining a higher spiritual life, and by throwing off its finiteness, as a personal, national spirit, a spirit of this world, its unity with the infinite spirit of heaven is brought out. Through faith in this Christ, particularly in his death and resurrection, is man justified before God; that is to say, through the quickening of the *Idea* of Humanity within him the individual becomes a partaker of the divinely human life of the species; — conformably to the fact, that the negation of *naturality* and *sensuality* * — which is but the negation of a negation, seeing that they are but the negation of the spiritual — is the only way for men to attain the true spiritual life.

* *Sinnlichkeit*: — See before, p. 287.

"This alone is the absolute purport of the Christology. That this appears connected with the person and history of an individual, belongs merely to its historical form." *

Such a passage is adapted to give a strong impression of the state of intellectual action in a country, where writing of this kind, instead of being received with universal wonder and derision, was regarded as matter of grave discussion, and as belonging to the highest department of philosophy.

The latest development which I have seen of the results to which the new theology has arrived is in the work of Strauss, before mentioned, on the "Doctrines of Christianity," which appeared almost simultaneously with the fourth edition of his "Life of Jesus." In that work he maintains the doctrine of Hegel concerning what Hegel calls God, and defends it, against some of his mistaken disciples, from the imputation of resembling the Christian doctrine, or that of any believer in the personality of the Supreme Being. The concluding chapters of the work are occupied with an attack on the belief of the future life, and of the immortality of the soul. His last words are these: —

* Leben Jesu (4th ed.), II. 709 – 711.

"If now the question be asked, what there is positive to set against these negations [involving the denial of the immortality of the soul], the whole answer (as Hegel too remarks) amounts to this; — that immortality is not to be conceived of as something future, but as a present quality of the spirit, as its inherent universality, its power of raising itself above all finite things to the *Ideal.* If men are accustomed also to give the name of Eternity to the life after death, this involves essentially the same requisite to its right apprehension. Hence, thinkers, who are in other respects on the right track, at once take a wrong course when they sometimes so express themselves as if, after the manner of the ancients, they would make immortality consist in posthumous fame, in the continued results of noble efforts, or even in being propagated through one's descendants, — in the reappearance in another of the *Idea* of Humanity* [*Idea* constituting a man], which had perished in one individual. The blessed results of the actions of eminent men after their death, and

* This language — one cannot say the conception, for there is none — is borrowed from Spinoza, according to whom men are only *ideas;* an idea in God constituting their "essence and existence." See particularly the Second Book of his Ethics, from the seventh to the eleventh Proposition.

the continuance of their names, are only a reflex of what was to them during life a present enjoyment of eternity, — occupation, namely, with essential interests, labor in the *Ideal.* So, too, the continuance of the species is a reflex of the present enjoyment of family love; — and the metamorphosis of the universe is, not in its endless course, but as something recognized, and thus, consequently, apprehended as present, an eternalization of the spirit. The exhortation of Schleiermacher, 'In the midst of finiteness to become one with the Infinite, and to be eternal in every moment,' is all that modern science has to say about immortality.

"Here, for the present, our business ends. For the other world is, in all respects, the one enemy, and, in its aspect as future, the last enemy, which speculative criticism has to encounter, and, if possible, to overcome."

"And this, then, is thy faith!" And he who announces it, and anticipates its victory, instead of veiling his head in abasement and utter desolation of spirit, is contemplating with complacency a time when God and religion shall be dispossessed of the world, and nothing shall remain but atheism, despair, the lowest moral and mental degradation, and German philosophy,

looking on with an idiot grin of triumph at its final success.

"And this, then, is thy faith! this monstrous creed!
This lie against the Sun, and Moon, and Stars,
And Earth, and Heaven! . . . . .
And know ye not,
That leagued against ye are the Just and Wise,
And all Good Actions of all ages past,
Yea, your own Crimes, and Truth, and God in Heaven?"

Throughout a great part of the civilized world, men are restlessly craving for better forms of society and government; for a deliverance from evils which they feel themselves, and which they see crushing others. Many are in the temper of unreasoning patients, so diseased and suffering that they are ready to adopt the pretended remedies of any impostor who boldly promises relief. But the cure of long-continued evils in a nation is analogous to the cure of long-continued diseases in an individual. It must be gradual; it must be accomplished with great patience and care; or the attempt to relieve may only aggravate the suffering. The existence of a well-organized state of society is solely the result of the character of the individuals who compose it. Many seem to think that republican institutions are the grand spe-

cific for the evils which exist; but a republic, to escape the worst disorders, to escape the loss of its essential character, if not of its very form and name, must have for its foundation the religious and moral principles of those who constitute and control it. In the most favored portions of our own land it is to the influence of moral principle, to the strong action of the sense of right and wrong, to the sympathy of man with man, that we owe our protection and security; — not to the immediate authority of government, nor to the exercise of civil or military force. Where this moral control does not exist, order can be preserved in a state only by substituting in its place human power, — arbitrary power lodged in the hands of an individual or a class, whose self-interest it is to prevent lawless and disorganizing violence. The less there is of moral principle in a community, the more stringent and irresponsible must be the power by which it is controlled. The government of banditti or of pirates must be despotic; and when a republic of unprincipled men is sinking, as it will, into anarchy and the bloody strifes of faction, the only refuge is a dictator. The attempt to establish freedom among people unprepared to feel and act as freemen, has been often enough repeated

in our time to satisfy one as to what must be its result. It is but four years since, that the oppressed and the reformers of Germany possessed themselves of the supreme power, but they were ignorant what to do with it. Even if they had had the wisest ends, they would have been unable to employ their power to any good purpose. The materials to be worked upon, the individuals to be governed, had not the strong sense of religion, and of the obligations of man to man, which are necessary to bind men together in a well-regulated society, — principles the want of which can be supplied by no human institutions, no written constitutions or laws.

Whatever tends to weaken the authority of religion, the authority of God, tends equally to the destruction of human happiness, and, especially, in reference to the topic immediately before us, to the destruction of all hope of better forms of human society. These must rest on the laws of God. Of his laws all human laws of binding force are but declaratory; from them they derive all their intrinsic authority. They are obeyed because conscience enforces obedience, — and this is perfect freedom. All other obedience to human laws must be only that which the direct or indirect dread of human power is able to compel.

ON THE

OBJECTION TO FAITH IN CHRISTIANITY,

AS RESTING ON

HISTORICAL FACTS AND CRITICAL LEARNING.

First published in 1839, as a note to the Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity.

ON AN

OBJECTION TO FAITH IN CHRISTIANITY.

In the attempts of the German theologians of the new school to separate what they call Christianity from its historical relations and its connection with the New Testament, very much has been imperfectly and obscurely said upon the impossibility of resting religious faith on such foundations. What is said, though often not altogether intelligible, evidently refers to a view of the subject which it is important to consider; and to objections that may arise in an intelligent mind. I will endeavor to state them distinctly in my own words.

It may be objected, then, to Christianity, that religion is a universal want, and should be founded on some universal principle of our nature; but that Christianity, on the contrary, rests on something extrinsic to our nature, on

testimony. That not only does this testimony in itself admit of doubt, but that it requires investigation. That the capacity and the means of a proper investigation of it are far from being common to all; and that many, or rather a large majority, must therefore receive Christianity, if they do receive it, without any satisfactory evidence of its truth. Nor is this all; it may be further objected, that the history of this supposed miraculous revelation is contained in certain books. In them are to be found the doctrines supposed to be made known. But a question immediately arises respecting the genuineness of those books. It cannot be certainly proved; for certainty is inconsistent with the nature of the only evidence that can be produced. This evidence is, furthermore, such as requires much learning and study to enable any one, by himself, to estimate its force. And, supposing the genuineness of the books to be rendered probable, they are in ancient languages, understood by few; and even when the language is mastered, still much various knowledge is further necessary to give them a probable explanation. By the generality, therefore, the historical fact of a revelation, the genuineness of its supposed records, and the purport of its supposed doctrines, must all be received on

trust; and the few who have the capacity and means of investigation can, at best, attain to nothing more than probable, not certain, conclusions; whereas religion, to be universal, should have an assured foundation in the very nature of man. It can rest upon nothing extrinsic to it.

I have endeavored to state these considerations, which well deserve attention, with clearness and force; avoiding those loose assertions, and that indefinite language, which some have fallen into from want of a distinct apprehension of what it was their purpose to urge. Let us now see what other view can be taken of the subject.

In one sense, and an obvious sense of the words, religion is a universal want of man. It is required for the development of his moral and spiritual powers. He is suffering, tempted, and imperfect; and he needs it for consolation, for strength to resist, and for encouragement to make progress. It is connected, not with any particular faculty or faculties, but with the whole nature of man as a moral and immortal being, a creature of God. But religious principle and feeling, however important, are necessarily founded on the belief of certain facts; of the existence and providence of God,

and of man's immortality. Now the evidence of these facts is not intuitive; and whatever ground for the belief of them may be afforded by the phenomena of nature, or the ordinary course of events, it is certain that the generality of men have never been able by their unassisted reason to obtain assurance concerning them. Out of the sphere of those enlightened by Divine revelation, neither the belief nor the imagination of them has operated with any considerable effect to produce the religious character. The belief of these facts, if it exist independently of Christian faith, must either be a mere prejudice, or must be a deduction of reason. But the process of reasoning required to attain the assurance of a Christian, if it might have been successfully pursued by a very wise, enlightened, and virtuous heathen, never was thus pursued; and it is scarcely necessary to say, that, to the generality of the heathen world before Christianity, the facts, that there is a God, in the Christian sense of that name, that man is immortal, and that the present life is a state of preparation for the future, were not matters of religious faith. Nor was there any likelihood that without Christianity they would ever become so. In rejecting Christianity, because it requires a process of reasoning to es-

tablish its truth, if we attempt to provide any other foundation for religion, it can only be by having recourse to a different process of reasoning, which experience has shown to be inefficacious, as respects a great majority of men.

But the rejection of Christianity on the ground just stated, and the pretence that the only true, universal source of religion is to be found in the common nature of man, have been connected by many with the rejection of all the reasoning by which those facts that are the basis of religion may be otherwise rendered probable; and often with the rejection of all belief in the facts themselves. The religion of which they speak, therefore, exists merely, if it exist at all, in undefined and unintelligible feelings, having reference, perhaps, to certain imaginations, the result of impressions communicated in childhood, or produced by the visible signs of religious belief existing around us, or awakened by the beautiful and magnificent spectacles which nature presents. Sometimes, as we have elsewhere seen, they are represented as being excited by a system of pantheism; a doctrine that rejects all proper religious belief, and does not admit of being stated in words expressing a rational meaning. In this case,

whatever feelings may exist, they can have no claim to be called religious.

There is, then, no mode of establishing religious belief but by the exercise of reason, by investigation, by forming a probable judgment upon facts. Christianity, in requiring this process, requires nothing more than any other form of religion must do. He who on this account rejects it, cannot have recourse to Natural Religion. This can offer him no relief from the necessity of reasoning; and still less can it pretend to give him any higher assurance than Christianity affords. If its voice be listened to, it will only direct him back to Christianity. If he will not refrain from using the name of religion, his only resource to escape the difficulty and uncertainty of reasoning is to take refuge in some cloud of mysticism, that belies the form of religion.

From those who reject Christianity on account of the labor necessary in fully ascertaining its evidences and character, it may reasonably be required, that, whatever be the new form of religion which they propose, it shall be generally intelligible, and established by proofs not requiring an effort of thought to be expected only from disciplined minds; and proofs, at the same time, as satisfactory as they

are easy to be understood. But the contrast is very great between this reasonable requirement and the character of the writings of those by whom the objection is urged. On the one hand, these writings are evidently not adapted to common comprehension; and, on the other, in proportion as any one is accustomed to think clearly, and reason consecutively, so will he be the more struck with their uncertain meaning, or the absence of meaning, the inconsistency of thought, and the want, or the inconsequence, of reasoning. It has even been made a matter of boasting by the disciples of the school, that these speculations are to be understood only by minds of a peculiar cast, prepared for their reception.

But we have not, it may be said, yet removed the difficulty, that the evidence and character of Christianity, in order to be properly understood, require investigations which are beyond the capacity or the opportunities of a great majority of men. Let us then consider to what this difficulty amounts.

In the first place, it is founded merely on the fact, that religious knowledge has the character common to all our higher knowledge, that it requires labor, thought, and learning to attain it. This is a fact; and it is a fact likewise,

that its attainment is attended with peculiar difficulties, such as do not commonly embarrass men in the pursuit of mere worldly sciences; since all vices and moral defects, all bad passions, sinister motives, low affections, and selfish aims, — every thing contrary to perfect sincerity of purpose, — operate to draw us away from the truth. But these facts are true of the study of religion in general, not of that of Christianity alone; and, therefore, form no special objection to the character of Christianity.

All the truths of philosophy, all those belonging to the higher departments of knowledge, all those connected with the intellectual and moral progress of mankind, all those most important to our worldly comfort and enjoyment, so far as their recognition has depended on man alone, have required strenuous and long-continued efforts of intellect to effect their gradual development, their clear exposition, and their general reception. These efforts have been made by a few individuals, the instructors of their race. The processes of reasoning by which these truths are established are now gone over and fully comprehended by only a comparatively small portion of men. But the benefit of these truths, the practical result of those investigations, are now a common prop-

erty and a common blessing. We are wise through the wisdom of others. Human knowledge is the aggregate wealth of civilized man, not the peculiar possession of individuals; and all may share its advantages, whether or not they have contributed to it, or even understand the means of its accumulation. To take one example: — Throughout the enlightened portion of the world, the facts which astronomy has made known are generally received. These facts are applied to most important purposes, as regards our worldly concerns. By affording such facilities, as could not have been imagined before they existed, to the intercourse between nations, they have rendered incalculable service, in promoting civilization, knowledge, and the social virtues. They have made the heavens teach us religion, converting them into a natural revelation of God. But astronomy is a science which it has been the labor of more than two thousand years to bring to its present state. This science, its proofs and its relations, are now the study of a life. If, then, because what it teaches is not obvious, but requires long investigation, or because its proofs can be fully understood but by few, or because it is not the result of the unfolding of any faculty or tendency common to all men, any one should

conclude that the truths which it makes known are to be rejected, and the benefits flowing from them disregarded, he would reason as wisely as he who reasons in a similar manner concerning Christianity.

In the one case, and in the other, and throughout the whole sphere of our higher knowledge, the results of the intellectual efforts of a few become the common benefit of many. None has made himself master of all the departments of knowledge; none has followed out any one of them into all its ramifications, and verified for himself every step in the evidence necessary to establish his belief. He who fancies he may have done so can have little comprehension of the relations of any important subject. However far one may have carried his own investigations, there is much that he receives because it is generally admitted as true, or because it is stated by writers on whom he is satisfied that he may rely. We are not insulated individuals, independent thinkers, whose business it is, each to build up a little system of his own out of the poor materials that he has gathered with the labor of his own hands. We are sharers in the wisdom of our race. The masses of knowledge which enlightened men are continually bringing into the

treasury of human improvement are soon converted into common currency. Each individual is not obliged to dig the ore from the mine for himself. Those who think most wisely are instructors of each other. They receive much upon each other's authority. The foundation of their wisdom is the aggregate wisdom of the age in which they live. Linked together, as we are, intellectually as well as morally, the individual makes progress with those about him. Whatever truths he may hold, he has not attained them by the unaided efforts of his own mind; he has commenced with some share, great or small, in the common stock of knowledge. It cannot, therefore, be an objection to any truth whatever, and, consequently, not to the truth of Christianity, that the full comprehension of its character and evidence is the result of studies which are pursued only by few, and that the many want capacity or opportunity to satisfy themselves on the subject by their independent, unassisted exertions.

But it may be said that no direct answer has yet been given to the question, — On what ground is the truth of Christianity to be received by those who are unable to give themselves to a full study of its evidences? The reply is, that it is to be received on the same

ground as we receive all other truths of which we have not ourselves mastered the evidences; for the same reason that we do not reject all that vast amount of knowledge which is not the result of our own deductions. Our belief in those truths the evidence of which we cannot fully examine for ourselves is founded in a greater or less degree on the testimony of others, who have examined their evidence, and whom we regard as intelligent and trustworthy. This is a ground of belief which is universal, and which if we relinquish, far the greater part of human knowledge must be relinquished with it. The likeness in the essential powers of men's minds gives them a common property in each other's acquisitions. What wise and honest men, who have devoted themselves to the examination of a subject, are satisfied is true, we may conclude, unless we can discern some special reason to the contrary, that we also should perceive to be true after similar investigation. This reliance on the knowledge of others may be called *belief on trust*, or *belief on authority;* but perhaps a more proper name for it would be *belief on testimony*, the testimony of those who have examined a subject to their conviction of the truth of certain facts. The reasonableness of such a belief is constant-

ly implied. In their opinions, and practical concerns, men are continually deferring to the judgment of those whom they think better informed than themselves. We commit our health and lives into the hands of a physician, relying implicitly on his opinions concerning our disease and its cure, while of the correctness of those opinions we may have no means of forming a judgment, other than our belief in his information and good sense. To take an example from the science to which we have before referred: — very few individuals, scarcely one in a million throughout the civilized world, have gone through the whole body of evidence by which it is demonstrated that all the motions of the bodies of the solar system in relation to each other are to be referred to the one law of gravity; yet he would be thought unwise, who, because he had not studied this evidence, nor any part of it, should therefore doubt the testimony of those who have. In the application of this universal principle of belief to the evidences and character of Christianity, all that is required of an intelligent man is, that he should admit it as an element in his reasoning; that he should rely, to a certain extent, on the trustworthiness of others who have made the subject their particular

study; that he should allow the truth of facts which they affirm, and which he sees no cause for doubting. Of the reasoning upon those facts he may judge for himself; and he will also judge to what extent he should thus receive information on trust. But it is no objection to Christianity, that a knowledge of its evidences and its character must rest in a certain degree on what is a universal condition of human knowledge, trust in the capacity and honesty of others. The admission of this principle does not weaken the force of its evidences in the mind of any man of correct judgment. In maintaining, therefore, that the thorough investigation of the evidences and character of our religion requires much knowledge and much thought, and the combined and continued labor of different minds, we maintain nothing that gives to Christianity a different character from what belongs to all the higher and more important branches of knowledge, and nothing inconsistent with its being in its nature a universal religion.

We have seen the reasonableness of believing, to a certain extent, on trust; or, if I may so use the term, on testimony. In considering the subject, the reasonableness of this principle of belief is not to be confounded with a very

important fact concerning it, — the fact that it is the actual foundation of belief in a great majority of mankind, on almost all subjects lying beyond the sphere of personal experience. There are those, who, in treating of man, seem to consider themselves as types of the human race in its actual condition; and, over-estimating perhaps their own powers of investigation, indulge in declamation concerning independence of thought, in which what is true is applicable only to a comparatively small number. Our first impressions, the belief of childhood, are the result of our trust in the testimony of others; and a similar trust, whether it be recognized by them or not, continues to be with a majority of men a main source of their opinions. Without any reasoning on the subject, we expect the operation of this principle of belief. We suppose, as a general fact, that one educated as a Roman Catholic will identify that form of faith with Christianity, however wide the difference may appear to us. We should regard it as a marvel, and as indicating extraordinary intellectual energy in the individual, should one brought up as a Mahometan become a sincere and intelligent Christian. The opinions of the majority of men are determined by the intellectual influences acting

upon them, which have their origin in a few minds.

The principle, then, of believing on testimony, however necessary and universal, may lead, and has led, to great errors; but this characteristic it has in common with every other principle of belief, except personal experience or mathematical demonstration. It is further to be observed, that all wrong opinions, though they may be propagated by it, must have had their origin in some other source. To whatever errors this form of belief may lead, it is an inevitable concomitant of our nature. The generality of men can be no wiser than their instructors.

This view of human belief, as resting in so great a degree upon what may be called testimony, serves to show strongly the responsibility that lies on all those who undertake to influence the opinions of their fellow-men, on any subject by their belief concerning which their moral principles or their happiness may be affected. Whoever may do so should have natural capacity for the office; he should have the requisite knowledge, of which extensive learning commonly makes a part; and he should be influenced by no motives inconsistent with a love of truth and goodness, by no craving for

notoriety, no restless desire to be the talk of the day, no party spirit, and no selfish purpose of maintaining doctrines, the profession of which he cannot renounce without the loss of some worldly advantage. Before he inculcates any peculiar opinions, he should have thoroughly studied them, have clearly defined them to his own mind, have traced out their relations, and have become persuaded that future investigation will not lead him to change them. And further, he should believe himself to see clearly that their promulgation will tend to good; since, if there be a God who rules all things in infinite wisdom and goodness, no general law or fact in the universe can ultimately tend to evil, and consequently no general truth, or affirmation of such law or fact, can be ultimately mischievous. In proportion, therefore, as the beneficial effect of any doctrine is doubtful, so far is its truth doubtful, on the supposition that there is a God. And if there be not a God, on which supposition truth might be mischievous, the moral offence of publishing a mischievous truth would still remain.

Judging from the practice of the day, the responsibility of which I speak is not greatly regarded; and we may conclude from the language which is freely used, that it is not gener-

ally understood. Men throw out their opinions rashly, reserving to themselves the liberty of correcting them, if they are wrong. If you would know for what doctrines they hold themselves responsible, you must look to their last publication. It deserves praise, we are told, for one to confess himself to have been in error. It does, without doubt; as it also deserves praise for one to repent of a crime and to make reparation; but a wise and good man, as he will avoid committing crimes, so, according to his ability, he will avoid promulgating errors on important, or unimportant, subjects. Another loose notion is, that there should be no discouragement, by the expression of moral disapprobation, to the promulgation of any doctrine, whatever may be its character, or whatever may be the moral or intellectual qualifications of the teacher; for that this would be putting a check upon freedom of discussion. The doctrine may be confuted, it is said, if it is erroneous. But it should be recollected, that many errors are in alliance with men's passions, vices, and follies, and that, when plausibly affirmed, they may be readily admitted by those who will not listen to, or perhaps could not comprehend, a series of explanations and arguments. It should likewise be recollected,

that a writer careless of facts, bold in his assertions, and confused and illogical in his conceptions, may commit more errors in a page, than an able man can confute in twenty; that these errors may be so gross, that one conversant with the subject may regard the task of exposing them as unworthy of him; and that it is hard to condemn such as are capable of informing others, to the poor employment of rooting out errors, the growth of which is encouraged by those who assign them the task. But it is only necessary to attend to the general principle, that, dependent as we all are upon the information and the opinions of others, no one has a right to assume the office of our instructor, who has not labored to qualify himself morally and intellectually for its proper performance.

But to recur to our general subject:—I have endeavored to state the objection, or the difficulty, which we have been considering, in the plainest manner, and, admitting it in its whole extent, have limited myself to a direct reply. It is said, that a great majority of men are not capable of investigating for themselves the evidences and character of Christianity, and therefore can have no reasonable foundation for their belief in Christianity. The direct answer,

to which alone we have attended, is, that trust in the information, judgment, and integrity of others, to a greater or less extent, as it is a universal and necessary, is also a rational principle of belief. If this be true, any further answer is not required; but very much more might be said to show the false view of the subject implied in that objection; and to make it evident that every one, accustomed to thought and reasoning, may, without any theological learning, strictly so called, be able to satisfy himself of the truth of Christianity by the exercise of his mind upon facts that cannot reasonably be doubted. But this subject involves the whole evidence of our religion; and it has been my purpose merely to show that this evidence is not to be rejected, because it is analogous in its character to that by which every other important truth is established among men.

The objection we have been considering goes directly against the possibility of any miraculous revelation from God, as a foundation of our religious belief. It would condemn us, as a matter of necessity, to the desolation of our ignorance. It would darken its shades; for, if Christianity be a delusion, if that religion which the most civilized portion of the world has professed, and the wisest men have be-

lieved, be founded in error; if that religion which has seemed to bring us near to God, and to confirm all our best hopes, and which has given vigor to every right motive, be false, — then a deeper and more chilling shade falls upon the world, and all human reasoning becomes more uncertain. By the rejection of Christianity, man is not left in the state in which he was before its promulgation. A new and gloomy marvel appears in the history of our race.

But, in truth, the mere fact that God has made a miraculous communication to men for their good, considered independently of any truths which he may have made known, is one of inexpressible interest. It introduces him within the sphere of human experience, and makes his existence a reality to our minds. It gives a definiteness to our ideas of him, that nothing else could afford. It presents him distinctly to our conceptions and feelings in his paternal character. It establishes a relation between God and man that could not otherwise exist, and immeasurably elevates our race in the scale of being. Christianity, simply as a revelation from God, rises on the history of man, like the sun on the natural world. We may doubt, we may disbelieve it; but it is vain to

contend that there cannot be plenary evidence of its truth, or that, this plenary evidence existing, it cannot be made satisfactory to the generality of men.

THE END.

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